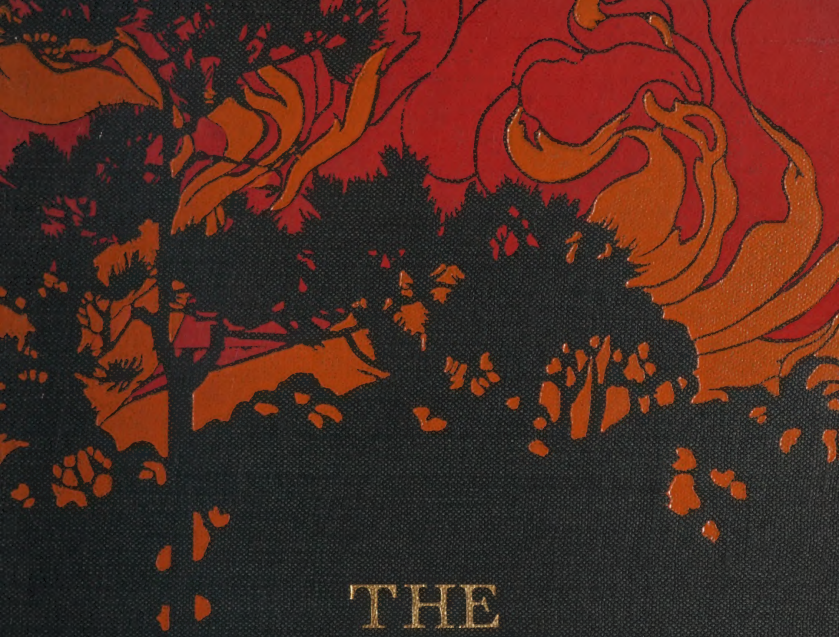

THE LEGATEE

ALICE PRESCOTT SMITH

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THE LEGATEE

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By ALICE PRESCOTT SMITH

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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TO MY

MOTHER AND FATHER

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	The Legacy	1
II.	Behind the Red Geraniums	13
III.	"What doth it profit?"	24
IV.	The House on the Bluff	31
V.	The Game of Chess	41
VI.	While the Sun shone	56
VII.	The Pot of Gold	67
VIII.	A Bridge is crossed	80
IX.	While the Pendulum was swinging	92
X.	Mistress Quixote	99
XI.	The Initial Move	107
XII.	Where Jessie reigned	120
XIII.	The Kermess	128
XIV.	An Awakening	139
XV.	"Need a Body cry?"	149
XVI.	The Début of Lady Patricia	158
XVII.	A Winter Blossoming	171
XVIII.	The Gate is barred	180
XIX.	An Impulse?	186
XX.	The Mask of Duty	195
XXI.	The Promise	203
XXII.	On the Lighthouse Trail	217
XXIII.	Mr. Proctor speaks	234
XXIV.	New Facets	245
XXV.	Cross-Currents	258
XXVI.	Day by Day	268
XXVII.	The Waiting	280
XXVIII.	The Coming	292
XXIX.	The Recompense	301
XXX.	The Measure	305
XXXI.	The Promise of the Covenant	313
XXXII.	Stewards of the Mysteries	319

THE LEGATEE

CHAPTER I

THE LEGACY

"'Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,'"

rose the voices, Karen Torstenson's above them all, sweetly insistent and compelling;

"'Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave.'"

Karen's voice, which had held the pitying cadence of a mother's croon, rose now in triumphant acclaim, and the choir followed blindly, dragging with jubilant abandon several notes behind the creaking cabinet organ. Karen's leadership was proved and trusted; the organ was an innovation, and the end of its probation was not yet.

The Wilsonport Methodist Church was crowded, despite the rain slapping against the windows, and the wind and fog rushing in from Lake Michigan. It was Olive Black's wedding day, and weddings like this were events in Wilsonport.

"'Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore.'"

pleaded the chorus as the bridal party dropped

their wet wraps, and came awkwardly up the aisle. But one face in the audience smiled. Not that the subtleties of humor were necessarily unknown in Wilsonport, but there was little that called for laughter in the fact that the organist could play only the hymns that she knew.

The two young people, stumbling noisily on the uncarpeted floor, stopped in front of the bare box pulpit where the clergyman stood waiting. There was but one touch of adornment in the room, — "Feed my Lambs." The text, its letters made of yellowing cedar twigs, formed a half circle back of the clergyman's head — a halo that might well have disquieted his congregation, for the winds of many months had robbed the sentence of its final "s," so that the mandate read with definite and unsoftened protest, a suggestive frame for the pinched face below.

In the rear of the room Robert Proctor stood watching observantly. His isolation, his manner, the very seams of his coat, bespoke him an alien; the unconscious amusement in his eyes marked him yet more as one. But apart from the fleeting thought of the moment, he was not amused. He was the new owner of the Wilsonport Lumber Company's mill, and this was his superintendent's wedding; yet though he had come to Wilsonport only the day before, no glance now made him welcome. Indeed, the only look that had shown recognition of his presence had held rebuke. His smile at the wail of the wedding march had been detected, and the scorn in the gray eyes that had

fronted his was unpleasant to remember. That the eyes belonged to one of the most youthful of the congregation, a young girl with a thin eager face and flying hair, did not affect his point of view. He was self-convicted of his rudeness.

"Do you, Olive, take this man" — The clergyman's voice was searching, for he had seen many go away from his presence man and wife, and they had not always gone to happiness; but the girl's "I do" thrilled confident and joyous. The challenge of her happiness sobered the listeners. Fate punished those who dared to claim such perfect joy.

The service was over, and again came Karen's voice. Clarion clear it sounded in the hushed room, —

"'He leadeth me! Oh, blessed thought,
Oh, words with heavenly comfort fraught!'"

The people needed no organ now, they heeded none, and they arose and sang; sang with rough, uneven voices; sang out of the gray monotony of tired hearts, —

"'Whate'er I do, where'er I be,
Still 't is God's hand that leadeth me.'"

Lines faded in tense faces, and eyes dimmed. They needed leading. For most of them life was tangled and perplexing, crowded with care. But for the time they had forgotten, and so they sang. They sang for Olive, and for her husband, George Cole. These two belonged to Wilsonport as did the great pines; therefore the people loved them,

and crowding about them now, they tried to tell them so.

There were none to crowd toward Mr. Proctor. It was an untried sensation for this man to find himself upon the fringe of events, and to his surprised chagrin the feeling annoyed him. He turned to look again at the girl who had resented his smile, but she had disappeared. He remembered that she had worn a red cap. He would know her by that, he thought, and speak to her if occasion offered. The justice of her arraignment still rankled.

"'He leadeth me, He leadeth me!'"

The refrain, carrying the vibrant sweetness of Karen's voice, stayed in his ears, and he looked across the room to where she stood, taller than the women around her, the yellow masses of her hair glinting even in the dull light.

"A viking princess," he said under his breath, "and what a voice!" But the princess was not for him. There was none of it for him — as yet — and he turned away into the rain. The rapture in the bride's face, the sense of homely joys and comradeship that had ennobled the crude incongruities of the day, passed him by. He was outside it all.

He walked toward his mill, with dogged discomfort ignoring the rain. The village looked deserted, and its small, unpainted houses stood dripping and lonely among the blackened stumps of the clearing. Before him, Lake Michigan, a roll-

ing mass of sullen gray, merged without horizon line into the leaden sky above. Behind, so near that the scattered houses of the settlement seemed clinging to the narrow beach for refuge, lay the forest, black and forbidding in the storm.

The man threw back his head impatiently. He had not supposed that his moods were dependent either on the barometer or on the liking of the people about him. Manifestly his coming had bred constraint. He must conquer that. In all probability, years of his life lay before him in this village, and since he could not occupy a pinnacle indefinitely, it behooved him to dismount while he could accomplish the descent with grace.

The mill was deserted in honor of the superintendent's wedding, and Mr. Proctor walked through its reverberating passages with a sense of rising independence. His own mill, his own machinery! Pride of ownership had worked into his consciousness but slowly; it came now with an alluring flavor. The long lines of belting, the glitter of the great saws, gave him an exultant sense of mastery. Powerful as they were, their power was yet his, his to control. He smiled as he realized how these material properties comforted his vanity. It was not, at this moment, that they represented money, but that they were all that needed him, that claimed him, in this alien land.

He walked to the top of the log-slide, and looked out. The mill was on the beach, and the shallow crescent of the bay lay before him. The

rain had ceased, but the wind blew furiously, and the surf rolled in with a boom of crashing breakers. The sand was as empty of life as a desert, and the man looked at it with longing. The electricity of the wind was in his blood. What a track that beach would make! In a moment he was on it, the wet sand springing under his running feet. Convention snatched at him fiercely as he ran, but he threw her off, and sped with bounding pulse. Should he be seen — why, he was running to the pier! It was his pier, and in danger from the storm! therefore he ran. That would do as explanation were he catechised. There was that in the air of Wilsonport that taught him the everboding imminence of catechism.

As he reached the pier, his pace slackened. Two figures were racing toward him, balancing surely on the pier's shaking timbers. What matter if they had seen him? They, too, were running, and doing it right well. He watched them with approval. They were boy and girl, and the girl wore a red cap. It was, he could see, his red-capped critic of the wedding. Here was his opportunity.

The runners were absorbed, and did not see Mr. Proctor. The girl was running with tight-pressed lips; she was losing, but not, it was plain, for lack of effort. She stopped at the end of the pier, her hand pressed to her side, her forehead clearing.

"You 've won, Adrien," — there was a somewhat disproportionate admiration in her voice, — "but — Let 's try it again from here to the mill."

She was starting without waiting for reply when she saw Mr. Proctor. Her arrested breath showed her surprise.

Mr. Proctor stepped forward, but the kindly greeting that he had in mind was not forthcoming. The girl was older than he had thought, and her gray eyes, again unfriendly and reproving, scattered speech. What was the meaning of all this fiery defiance?

She turned to her companion.

"There 's father, Adrien. I 'll leave you now, and go home with him." She vanished even with her words, and Mr. Proctor smiled after her. Evidently to think was to act with this whirlwind apparition.

The boy did not share the man's smile. The portentous dignity that strives to hide embarrassment wrapped him in sombre folds.

"A great storm, is n't it?" the man said with insistent cheerfulness. This gloom of reserve piqued his curiosity.

"Yes, it is a grand storm. I am just going." The boy spoke with punctiliously clear enunciation, yet a slight accent clung to his carefully chosen words.

The man turned. "I 'll walk with you. I am a stranger here. I came" —

"You came yesterday on the Lurline, Mr. Proctor. Everybody in town knows that."

The man's eyebrows shifted a shade from the horizontal. "Fame, verily! I should n't have suspected it from my reception this afternoon. And your name?"

The boy was silent a moment, his grave young face set with the pallid fixity of ivory. "Adrien Lauzeone," he said with grudging deliberation. "My father is Xavier Lauzeone. He keeps the hotel — 'The Farmer's Friend.' It 's a saloon, too," he added defiantly.

"I remember. I was told that my men stayed there — some of them. I did n't see you at the wedding."

The boy's face melted to curving lines. This was the way men talked to equals. Perhaps the "Farmer's Friend" was not a stigma after all.

"How was the wedding?" he asked. "Was the church full?"

"Yes, crowded. You were not there?"

"I am a Catholic." The boy's tone held a touch of impatience. It was plain that this prosperous outsider had much to learn.

"Oh!" said Mr. Proctor, vaguely aware of quicksands. "But your friend was there. Who is she, and who is your Norse princess? I wish that you would tell me about the people here. The singer this afternoon was a very daughter of the Eddas, who" —

"I don't understand what you 're saying," interrupted the boy, — his hurried speech suggested that he wished a change of subject, — "but I will some day. No one here would understand you — no one but Katherine Edmister. Katherine talks the same way — and Dr. Edmister, too."

"I doubt that I understood myself," said Proctor lightly. There was no need to emphasize his

awkwardness by explanation. "In my mother tongue, then, who was the tall girl who sang? She had a voice like dripping honey."

"Dripping honey," pondered the boy. "That 's just like Karen. You must know Karen Torstenson; they keep the store."

"The store?" Yes, he recalled it. "'Dry Goods and General Merchandise. Ole Torstenson.'" It was the mill store, and he had been there that morning. He felt a gentle glow of pleasure that he was connected, even remotely, with its display of plough and crockery, if those utensils ministered to the well-being of the day's goddess.

Young Lauzeone looked curious, and the man was pricked from his reverie by the pressing necessity of sustaining the conversation.

"Who was the lamb?" he ventured wildly. It was difficult to keep his auditor in mind, when his thoughts were struggling with chaotic impressions of the grimy interior of Ole Torstenson's store.

"The lamb?"

"The clergyman, I mean. Protestants call them lambs sometimes," he added with ready mendacity. "Never mind, I 'm not so much interested in him. Who was it that you said talked as I do?"

The boy's eyes shifted. He looked embarrassed.

"I guess you mean Dr. Edmister," he said evasively. "He 's the doctor here. He lives up on the bluff."

"In the big log house hanging over the water?"

"He wanted it made of logs," the boy protested. "He 's rich enough to have a better house. He

likes log houses." The hopelessness of impressing his auditor with so palpable an absurdity saddened his tone.

"Does he?" Here, then, was something that augured promise for the future, and Mr. Proctor looked expectantly down the curve of the beach to where a brown lichen of a house clung to the cliff that tipped the southern horn of the harbor's crescent. "And his wife?"

The wind tossed the black strands of the boy's hair into his eyes. "He has n't any wife. She 's dead. I said his girl — his daughter, I mean," he corrected. "Mrs. Green keeps house for him — that is, her and Ephraim does. Ephraim 's her husband."

They had reached the office door of the mill, and Mr. Proctor stopped and studied the figure before him.

"It 's too windy to go farther now," he said, "but come to see me. I live in the house that was my uncle's — back of the lumber piles. No wonder that you didn't understand my stupidly long words. But I 've a book that will tell you what I was talking about. Would you like to read it?"

The boy's pleasure appeared in his eyes, to vanish swiftly. He drew back.

"The mill is yours now?" he asked.

The tone brought Mr. Proctor's wandering glance to earth. "Yes, the mill is mine." It was the tone of the conscious superior, and he amended it. "My uncle, who owned the mill, is dead, you know. I am his heir."

"The men say that it's the same thing," the boy pursued. "They don't see any difference."

"A reincarnation, am I? Well, what of it?"

Again the boy's eyes shifted. "Did you have slaves?"

Mr. Proctor smiled. The lad was developing surprises. "Naturally," he said. "Did my biographers omit to state that I was from Virginia?"

The boy turned away. His stubborn mouth showed that he could understand the tolerant amusement that he was helpless to resent.

"I hope you'll come for the book, Adrien?" Mr. Proctor went on. "I've no slaves now, I assure you, whatever my shameful past may have been." His smile was whimsical, but he held out his hand, and the boy took it shyly.

"I'd like to come," answered the boy. "I want to study everything. I mean to know as much as Kather— as much as anybody. I don't work in your mill, so I don't see what the men can do, even if I do come to see you. The war is over, anyway. The men say" —

"The men say?" Mr. Proctor picked up the broken thread only to drop it. It was not to his mind to discuss his workmen and their vagaries with this boy. "Come and get the book, then. Good-by."

Adrien hesitated. "You — you asked me who — who it was that was running. But I did n't tell you because — It was Katherine Edmister, the one I told you about. There she is; and that's her father."

Mr. Proctor's glance traveled with the boy's gesture. The red cap was going up the village street, dancing like a wind-blown leaf in the wake of a tall man.

Dr. Edmister and his daughter! Mr. Proctor looked after them with meditative anticipation. Yet if the father proved as stormy as the daughter had shown herself to be — He shook his head at the memory as he unlocked his office door.

CHAPTER II

BEHIND THE RED GERANIUMS

JESSIE applied her eye to knowledge at the crack of Mr. Proctor's study door. Jessie was a legacy — not catalogued, as were the mill and other properties, but none the less an inheritance.

She was a Norwegian woman who had kept Mr. Oliver Proctor's house during his life in Wilsonport; she would continue to keep it for his nephew. The phrase, which defined the situation, was her own. To be a man's servant was one thing, to keep his house, another; she drew the distinction with nicety of line. To keep a house demanded more than skill in cooking — though that was hers. The habits of the family were a charge to keep, and she spared no labor in reforming them. She was studying them now upon her knees, and the line of her eyebrows spoke dissatisfaction.

"Your uncle was always prompt to meals," she chanted at length. Her voice took the village into confidence.

Mr. Proctor laid down his pen without surprise. A month of Wilsonport and Jessie had inured him to voices which spoke from key-holes and window casings. "Come in, Jessie," he called. "Is it supper time?"

Jessie materialized with confusing promptness.

"You said that you was going away to supper," she said. "You told me that you was invited to George Cole's." Her tone implied rooted unbelief of his intentions.

Mr. Proctor looked at his watch. "I am. And it 's almost six now." He turned from his papers with a smile. "So my uncle was prompt, was he?"

Jessie nodded. Her brown face, despite its wrinkles, repelled the suggestion of age. She seemed as superior to the weakness born of time as if she were the gnarled tree-trunk she resembled. "'T ain't that he was prompt when they asked him," she supplemented. "They never asked him."

"Asked him?"

"To supper." She nodded again, each movement pregnant with meaning. "I did n't suppose they 'd ask you." There was veiled pride in the admission, and she hastened to cover it. "They 've been long enough making up their minds to do it, anyway. You 've been here a month to-morrow."

Mr. Proctor's glance had returned to his papers. "Did n't they like my uncle?" he asked with tolerant civility and an absent mind.

Jessie's eyes snapped. "Hated him like pizen. He never listened to what folks said, either — any more than you do. Smiling ain't listening, let me tell you." She turned an indignant back, and started toward the kitchen, then stopped. "They called your uncle 'Copperhead,'" — she delivered

her postscript as if it were a missile, — "and George Cole 's gone to housekeeping in the house with the red geraniums in the window."

Mr. Proctor looked after her, live interest quickening his eyes. "'Copperhead!'" he meditated. "That 's what the boys called me to-day. So Jessie 's not the only legacy not mentioned in the will." He shrugged his shoulders, but his lips curved upwards, and the smile stayed with him in his walk across the sand. It was somewhat ghoulish, this wearing of a dead man's mantle, but it had its compensations. Since his surroundings held no companionship, it was a boon that they could furnish amusement, and he would welcome novelty in any guise.

Behind the red geraniums, Mrs. Cole extended a shy hand in welcome.

"George will be in pretty soon," she explained. "He could n't come till the hands left the mill, and he 's just cleaning himself up now."

The cleaning up disclosed the host in his wedding broadcloth, grave and unabashed. His unsmiling face turned often to his wife with evident affection, but his words were austerely few, and supper was eaten in the silence which a rite demands. Mr. Proctor's thoughts canvassed the known world for dialogue, but each essay failed to evoke more than a monosyllable. The social experience of years seemed threatened with shipwreck when a scratch at the kitchen door brought the hostess to her feet.

"That sounds like Chevalier," she cried with re-

lief. "Katherine must be out there. I 'll call her in to supper."

Mrs. Cole opened the door, and a small dog bounded in with a delighted whine, pawing, with ingratiating impartiality, at the people and chairs alike.

"Send him out, Olive," came a clear voice. "Chevalier understood that the Panjandrum was coming to tea, and he 's after the sacrificial calf. He 's always pushing himself socially."

Silence chilled the table, while a whispered consultation took place behind the door. "I must come in and explain," the voice went on, clearer and more expostulatory. "Indeed I must, Olive. No, I must come now."

Katherine Edmister herself followed the voice, and Mr. Proctor's face showed sudden interest. He had not seen her since the day of the wedding, and the memory of her look quickened his curiosity. If her tongue matched her eyes there would be no lack of conversation now.

"Miss Edmister, let me make you acquainted; this is Mr. Proctor," said Mrs. Cole with slow formality. Introductions were blessedly infrequent in Wilsonport, and the form limped slightly on the rare occasions of its appearance.

The geographical restraints imposed by chair and table fettered Mr. Proctor's bow, though he improved the limited area offered him, but the girl came forward, and held out a brown hand. Her weapons seemed sheathed. Her anger had apparently been a childish impulse, soon forgotten.

"I 'm afraid that you heard me call you the Panjandrum," she began at once. "I am sorry. I supposed that you were in the other room. I did n't mean to be unpleasant. Indeed I did n't. But, you see, we have so little to talk about here! I really meant," her wide firm mouth twitched slightly at the corners, "to be complimentary."

Her look was candid as a child's. In truth she seemed little more than one, with her slight figure and flying hair, and Mr. Proctor showed his frank amusement.

"If I bury the Panjandrum, will you put the lamb in the same grave?" he hazarded. "I know that you saw me laugh at the wedding."

The girl's look did not respond. She turned with a touch of hauteur that added years to her apparent age. "I must go, Olive," she began abruptly, and walked toward the door, shaking her head in smiling refusal of Mrs. Cole's appeals.

Mr. Cole pushed back his plate. "I want you to stay, Katherine," he said with an air of finality.

The girl stopped instantly, though her mouth was mutinous. "I 've had my supper," she demurred, "and father will worry."

"I 'll take you home," Mr. Cole went on with the same note of command, "and we can send word to your father when Heinrich goes up with the milk."

"Very well," said Katherine with instant submission. She drew a chair to the table, and Mr. Cole watched her, an air of responsibility tempering his evident pride.

"You 're old enough to put your hair up, Katherine," he chided. "Mr. Proctor thinks that you 're a little girl."

The girl flushed, and looked at Mr. Proctor defensively. "I am not very old," she protested. "Karen is so dignified that you expect too much from me." She seemed less annoyed at the personality than anxious to cover the abruptness of Mr. Cole's speech. She turned to Mr. Proctor. "Do you know Karen Torstenson?" Her eyes lighted at the name.

It was the man's turn to feel confused. He had not realized till that moment that Miss Torstenson had been in his thoughts.

"Miss Karen is the — she sings, does n't she?"

"Karen is a child of God," asserted Mr. Cole. "Yes, she sings in the choir. You ought to know her. I 'll get her now, and we can have a sing."

His wife nodded placid approval. "Get Paul Livingstone to come too," she called after him, "and ask him to bring his 'Precious Jewels.'"

Mr. Proctor ventured a smile. "Does he wear them — the jewels?" He turned toward Katherine, but her grave face reduced jesting to impertinence.

Mrs. Cole's light laugh expressed less of amusement than of comfortable acquiescence. "It 's a singing book," she conscientiously explained. "'Precious Jewels' is just its name. I wanted Paul Livingstone to bring it along with him. Paul Livingstone 's our teacher."

"Oh!" said Mr. Proctor comprehensively and

with meekness, oppressed by Katherine's deliberate scrutiny. He had no words to add, for they were entering the front room, and the gloom of that formal apartment fell blightingly upon his spirit. All his standards were at fault, and he surrendered himself to the red plush arms awaiting him, bereft of whatever small talk his life had taught him. He seemed thinking in a foreign tongue.

Mrs. Cole sat down on a worsted bird of violent plumage, and rocked to and fro. Her air of pleased content was in itself an illumination of the labyrinth of Mr. Proctor's doubts. Why, he was not expected to talk! Clearly the compulsion of conversation, other than as a means to an end, was unknown to Mrs. Cole's mind.

A rap at the kitchen door broke the spell.

"It 's Mr. Heinrich with the milk, Olive." Katherine, who had remained in the kitchen, looked in to explain.

Heinrich was the keeper of the lighthouse, and the village dairyman as well, — a small bent man, with shrewd eyes and grizzled hair. He met Katherine with a bow of exaggerated deference, and she responded with a courtesy of equal import. Then they laughed, as friends of old time laugh together, and went into the pantry, whence disjointed murmurs of further laughter reached the front room. Mr. Proctor looked at his hostess, but she made no explanation even when Katherine's clear treble was heard to say, —

"Say to the Lady Bertha that court will be held Saturday next."

The answer which Mr. Proctor awaited with shameless eagerness was lost in the sound of Mr. Cole's steps outside.

With Mr. Cole came Karen Torstenson, and a sombre-eyed young man who was introduced as Mr. Livingstone, the teacher. Miss Torstenson, her height dwarfing the men beside her, entered with a matronly assurance of movement that contradicted her dimple. Her blush, as she was introduced, meant nothing, but was entrancing to watch, and the three men, each to his fashion, paid tribute — Mr. Cole with the complacence of familiarity, Mr. Proctor with undisguised admiration, and the schoolmaster with a frown of protest.

There was no lack of conversation now. It ran the gamut of the day's sorrow and comedy; the price of hemlock bark; the working out of the road tax; the run of whitefish; the sinking of a schooner. Mr. Proctor listened, but most of the talk was Chaldaic to his mind. He looked at Katherine. She sat, her dog in her arms, her face vivid with attention, and his interest in her flagged. He had thought, in an unformulated way, that the girl's defiant attitude might be a reflection of her father's revolt against the restrictions of the village life, and that he might find in Dr. Edmister one to whom this gossip was a weariness. But no. The voices about him quoted the doctor as authority. Father and daughter evidently looked at this as life. Mr. Proctor was conscious of disappointment.

It was a relief to turn to Karen. She rocked in radiant calm, talking not at all, but laughing, now and then, at nothing in particular, with the gurgling rush of a meadowlark's note, — a sound so delicious that Mr. Proctor wondered if his admiration of it were patent enough to be disconcerting. Mr. Livingstone's eyes followed him with unpleasant intentness, and though his weeks in Wilsonport had wonted him to unexplained dislike, this look seemed needlessly hostile.

The talk was now of the church, and George Cole had forgotten his taciturnity in a discussion of the needs of the Sunday-school. They had been having a revival, he parenthesized to Mr. Proctor, and now they must plan to hold the young people. His unembarrassed speech was convincing, and Mr. Proctor's intelligence joyed in a sudden understanding of his superintendent's force. He remembered Katherine's docility of the earlier evening; was it because she, too, appreciated strength that she had given such swift obedience? He looked across at her with a return of curiosity.

She met his scrutiny with unconsciousness of his existence. Her mind was following Mr. Cole, and she shook Chevalier's submissive paw to testify to her approval.

"They need work to keep them interested," she interrupted. "I 'll make the girls in my class give a tenth of their berry money. It 's going to be a great raspberry year."

Mr. Proctor's too ready smile betrayed him; the

connection between revivals and raspberries seemed remote.

"Picking berries is hard work," Katherine flashed. "Honest work — work that 's worth while."

Mr. Proctor alone understood the addendum, but he refused to meet the challenge, and dismissed the matter with a mental shrug. The girl was tiresome with her perpetual defiance of his smiles. Had she undertaken to champion the entire village?

Karen smiled languidly at her friend's enthusiasm. Her blue eyes were untroubled by a hint of either assent or protest, and the very folds of her gown radiated calm. Mr. Proctor walked over to her and began to talk. It was worth while to wake her laughter.

"Sing for us, Karen," Mr. Cole said, after a pause. He dropped his head back, and his face resumed its mask.

Karen rose at once, and picked up a singing book.

"Page sixty-seven," Livingstone begged, as she passed him.

The girl smiled obediently. She was standing by the table, and the light behind her shone through the cobweb tissues of her hair.

"'Hark! hark, my soul; angelic songs are swelling.'"

Karen's voice held now no suggestion of the resonant organ tone of the day of the wedding. With faint flute notes, tender as the cry of birds at

wakening, it filled the little room with throbbing suggestions too evanescent for speech.

No voice joined Karen's. Katherine had crept over to Mrs. Cole, laying a childish head, with tumbled hair, close to her protecting arm, and her face looked small and awed.

> "'Onward we go, for still we hear them singing.
> Come, weary souls, for Jesus bids you come.'"

What did Katherine know of weariness? Yet her red lips trembled.

Long night seemed stealing on them as they listened — night and infinity; and George Cole's hand sought his wife's and held it closely in the dark folds of her gown. The fire of the zealot glowed in Livingstone's eyes as he listened, but no call to arms was in the singer's voice — only the pleading of the fostering mother; and through the white radiance of the moonlit village the echo followed the little party to their homes.

> "Far, far away, like bells at evening pealing,
> The voice of Jesus sounds o'er land and sea:
> And laden souls by thousands meekly stealing,—
> Kind Shepherd, turn their weary steps to Thee."

CHAPTER III

"WHAT DOTH IT PROFIT?"

It was four o'clock of the next day. Paul Livingstone closed the red covers of his school register, and looked with a sigh over the waiting rows of pupils. That his sigh was of relief was a matter for personal rebuke, and he would expiate it later; but now, even his mind inclined to idleness. June had come to Wilsonport with sunrise.

Mr. Livingstone rose. "All those," his voice was portentous, "who have communicated to-day may stand."

A moment's pause, then Karen Torstenson and Katherine Edmister rose in the rear of the room. It was a daily tableau, but it held ever the thrill of novelty, and a laughing rustle swept the expectant ranks. The master's face twitched; his look traveled down the lines, but each face met his suspicion with reproachful composure, and his glance dropped, baffled.

"Miss Torstenson and Miss Edmister may remain in their seats," he said. "Attention! Ready! One — two" —

The tramping feet — they were the heavier that the door was near, and the out of doors lawlessly beguiling — filled the room with a haze of white

dust, through which Mr. Livingstone peered dubiously at his refractory pupils. The ordeal before him lost none of its poignancy through daily familiarity.

"You may report at the desk, young ladies," he said with ceremony, and awaited them stiffly as they came up the echoing room.

"Have you any explanation, Miss Torstenson?" Mr. Livingstone's eyes fled from the girl's while using her name.

Karen's ready dimple answered for her, but the teacher's look was downcast, so her "No, sir," was edifyingly meek.

"You know the rules, Miss Torstenson — I cannot allow" — the man stumbled.

Katherine looked amused. "Karen did n't whisper — much," she interrupted, "and I 'm to blame, anyway, for I tempted her."

Mr. Livingstone turned from Miss Torstenson with relief, and looked at the speaker; he had no difficulty in meeting her eyes.

"Do you realize, Miss Edmister, what your report will be this month?" he asked with emphasis. "Do you know you are the most unruly member of this school, and I must mark you as such?"

"Yes, sir," Katherine assented blithely. Her tone was studiously respectful, but her glance strayed; it was clear that her enormities weighed but lightly on her spirit.

"You are too old to be punished, and I can only mark your deportment card, and trust to your pride." Mr. Livingstone's voice was the monotone

of stereotyped phrase, and his pupil's mind was with the dimpling lake without. The man looked at her. "I wish you'd try to do better, Katherine," he said impulsively. "You have so much influence with the younger girls, that you make my work very hard."

Katherine's eyes came back from the window. "Do I?" There was evident contrition in her surprise. "Why, I never thought of it in that way, and I won't do it any more — that is — I'll try. But really I was to blame about Karen."

Karen, who had been playing with a sprig of lilac in her belt and listening idly, as to an oft-heard tale, lifted her head at sound of her name, and gave her teacher a brilliant smile. Quadratic equations left her mind nebulous, but she had other knowledge much more valuable, and the charts of this young man's thought were quite within her grasp. The look which he gave her in return shook for a moment her usual composure, and she turned sharply, catching her long braids of hair on a projecting screw of the recitation bench. Mr. Livingstone sprang to his feet, but Katherine was before him.

"Let me do it. You 'll break Karen's hair," she said jealously. Her brown hands were deft, and she unwound the strands with loving caution.

> "'Her yelwe heer was browded in a tresse,
> Byhynde her bak, a yerde long I gesse,'"

she lightly quoted. "There! I 've saved every inch of the yard, Karen. Good-night, Mr. Livingstone."

The teacher's long breath of relaxation made him oblivious for the moment of Adrien Lauzeone's soft-footed approach. The boy waited, immobile, patient. Heredity had taught him the attitude of the inferior.

"Well, Adrien, what is it?" asked the man. The schoolmaster had dropped from him when Katherine ran down the steps.

The boy leaned against the desk with the confidential air of one prepared for a long talk.

"You heard what Katherine said," he began, — "all that poetry about the hair. Do you know who wrote it?"

"No," the man answered. "Katherine Edmister knows a good many things that I don't," he admitted with troubled sincerity.

The boy's nod was sage. "I know who wrote it," he said, ignoring the confession. "His name was Chaucer. Dr. Edmister gave me the book." There was silence for a moment, and the plash of the waves sounded loud. "Dr. Edmister talks that way, saying things out of books," the boy went on with an effort, "and now Mr. Proctor has come from outside, and he talks the same way. I 'm not going to stay here always" — He paused for the evident deduction.

The master's face was attentive. "I understand, Adrien; you need more than I can give you," he said with humility that suggested no touch of affectation. "Yet books are not all, and I have done for you the best that I know how. I have carried you greatly on my heart. I have

striven, to the utmost, for all of you. And now some of you," his eyes dropped, "are drifting away."

The boy looked impatient. "Well, then you see how it is," he pursued with ruthless egotism; "I 'm only wasting my time here. Maybe Mr. Proctor will talk to father — but I want you to talk to him first. Father does n't like Mr. Proctor."

Mr. Livingstone's look changed; it grew harder.

"Do you see much of this Mr. Proctor, Adrien?"

"He lends me books. You want me to read all the books I can get. You said so."

Mr. Livingstone bent a perturbed frown on the boy. "I want you to grow to the full stature of a man, not to consort with a law-breaker, with a man who trafficked in human souls, and is a free-thinker and drunkard as well."

"But he is n't a drunkard!" cried the boy.

"What is he, then? Not a teetotaler. I asked him last night. I wanted him to speak before my Mission Band, and he refused. 'He who is not for us, is against us.' Never forget that, Adrien."

Adrien looked unconvinced. "Dr. Edmister drinks wine, too," he said carelessly. Then, with a touch of shrewdness that sharpened his features, "Mr. Proctor has such lots of money. Perhaps he 'll help father send me away to school."

Mr. Livingstone's hand pressed the boy's shoulder. "Adrien! 'What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world?'" he cried. "Would

you sell your soul for such a mess of pottage as this man's money? And if Dr. Edmister does drink wine — Oh, I have known for a long time what influence was working against me! Adrien, are you tending the bar again?"

Adrien scowled. "It 's me or Ferdinante — evenings. Katherine said I ought to be ashamed — not taking my turn. She said it might be a very saintly thing to do, to stay at home and send my sister to the saloon to do my work, but that if it was, she hoped my halo would have pricks in it." His voice mimicked the disdain in the girl's tone.

The man's face took heavy lines. "It 's as I thought. Surely a man's foes are of his own household. Shut your ears to Katherine. She has an idle tongue, and it betrays her."

The boy's face showed rising color. "Katherine 's in your church," he said suspiciously. "It 's queer for you to talk about her like that. Why, Ferdinante says that she 's leading me away; she says the priest says so," he broke off, with an embarrassed laugh.

"'If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off.'" The man's eyes glowed as if the words fed inward fires. "What if Katherine is in the church! That makes her even more a stumbling block. She is like her father. Be warned, Adrien. There is much that is worldly, much that is seditious and unsettling, that comes from that house on the bluff."

"Don't you want me to go to the Edmisters'?" The boy was frowning.

The schoolmaster paced the floor. "I want

you to feel," his voice was rising, "that all are as chaff who do not execute judgment and righteousness. Strange times are at hand. The spoiled shall be delivered from the hand of the oppressor. Then woe to them who by sitting in high places cause a brother to offend. The sword of the Lord and Gideon shall smite."

"What are you going to do?" asked the boy with practical eagerness. His eyes had lost their doubt.

Mr. Livingstone's hand reproved him. "It is not I — yet the Lord sometimes reveals his purpose through the humblest of his instruments. And were I chosen — But first must come a winnowing of the wheat. Those who are dross, be they our dearest, must be burned away." His tone was growing tense.

A wandering breeze gathered a spray of lilac from the top of a desk, and tossed it against the young man's hand. He started, and mechanically picked it up. The crushed flowers still held their fragrance, and the man's face broke into gentler lines.

"Adrien" — his voice was almost tender; the flowers were lying in his palm — "changes — changes, and great deeds — lie before us here in Wilsonport, but the appointed time is not yet. I shall be away this summer. When I return I shall bring help, and the fields may perchance be ready for the plough. In the mean time pray without ceasing that those who are dear to us may not be found among the chaff."

CHAPTER IV

THE HOUSE ON THE BLUFF

From the village to the house on the bluff a narrow footpath twisted upward through the pines, and while Adrien and Mr. Livingstone talked at the schoolhouse, Katherine loitered homeward under broidered canopies of leaf and blossom. The sombre green of the dark pines was broken here by trees of lighter foliage: silver birches lifted airy minarets of pendulous boughs; sumachs thrust heavy spears of green from out their leafy tangles, and aspens, tortured by the snows of bygone winters, cast strange contorted shadows on the path. The sunshine of late afternoon dappled the moss-grown trunks with gold, and flushed with faint pink the waxen blossoms of the Linnæus, that trailed with graceful garlanding across the way. Harebells blossomed in sunny nooks, and here and there, amid the deeper shade, late wintergreen berries glowed from out their glossy leaves, flecking the ground with crimson splashes.

It was a goodly world, and Katherine went through it softly singing. She stopped many times: now to throw herself at full length on the crackling pine needles, resinous and aromatic in the sun; now to chatter with a friendly chip-

munk; and now to arbitrate, with dignity of gesture, between two woodpeckers who were holding a wordy altercation on the sheltered side of a blasted pine.

The long log house that Dr. Edmister and his daughter called home hung, as Mr. Proctor had said, over the water, just where the rounding shoulder of the bluff dropped, with a sheer plunge, to the beach below. Its walls, mellowed by nature's craft to ashen gray, were tapestried with curtains of wild grape, and the low veranda in front of the house was hung with masses of Virginia creeper.

Katherine found her father sitting in the shade of the veranda, surrounded by a litter of books and fishing-rods; and tossing her hat on the floor, she curled beside him with a contented sigh.

Dr. Edmister lifted an interrogative face.

"Late again! Were you kept after school?" The censure in his tone was perfunctory, and his daughter slipped a caressing hand along his arm.

"Don't tell Mrs. Green," she coaxed. "She 'll make me a subject for special pleading in prayer-meeting. I 'm getting on her conscience."

Dr. Edmister attempted a frown. It sat ill upon his sensitive, clean-cut face, and he abandoned the attempt with dispatch. "You persist in a very childish attitude, Katherine," he said with lingering protest. "If you lived anywhere but in the top of a pine-tree in the Wisconsin forest — yes, I saw you yesterday; don't squander that look of artless surprise — you would be a

young lady. Is it quite worthy of your years to spend your time devising trouble for that serious-minded young man? Not," he added, with rising warmth, "that the man's personality is in the least in question. He has been placed in a position of authority over you, and I have tried to teach you to respect authority, no matter how clothed. You are, I fear, an idle pupil in more senses than one."

The girl flushed. "He asks who has communicated," she said plaintively. "What can I do? Communicate? Of course I communicate. If my tongue did n't, my eyes would. Why will he use that absurd word? And when I stand up alone, night after night, — Karen was with me to-day, but she inclines to paths of virtue, — he looks at me with horror and forgets all about the whispering that has been going on under his eyes all day. Please don't look reproving. It 's not permissible for one to be so stupid."

"You are experimenting, then, with the man's confidence in the honor of his pupils?" Dr. Edmister queried judicially.

"I am experimenting with his common-sense," Katherine returned with emphasis. "Think of a grown man so shortsighted as not to see that he is teaching the children to lie in the most brazen fashion — Oh, look!" with a quick change of tone. "There 's Mr. Heinrich's sail — I can see the patch on the jib! He 's coming in from the shoal, too! The signs read Bass for supper!"

Dr. Edmister picked up a fly-book from the veranda floor, and dusted its covers with affection-

ate solicitude. "The signs will read bass to-morrow night, at all events," he prophesied.

The girl caught the complacence in his tone. "Are you going out with Mr. Heinrich?" The voice was wistful.

"I think so. If it 's a quiet evening we 'll sail over to the middle grounds, and I 'll try a few casts. I have n't had my tackle out this year."

"Am I tackle?" murmured the girl, with arching brows.

"Not this time. The boat is small, and I need Heinrich to manage the sail. I want a good basket to-morrow."

"Five barley loaves," suggested the girl. "You know that we can't eat more than three small fishes. Have n't I heard remarks about pot fishermen? Oh, take me with you, and let the good basket go!"

Dr. Edmister shook his head. "Mr. Proctor has been informed," he said, "that a bass never takes a fly in these waters. He has a book that is somewhat dogmatic on the subject. It 's unfortunate, this habit of believing in books," he mused, smiling. "It fetters the imagination. Now look at this jungle cock!" He took a vividly hued fly, and held it to the light. "What bass of sober character and habits would think of refusing that?"

Katherine's eyebrows lost their arch, and drew ominously near together. "I did n't know that you knew Mr. Proctor. You said that you did n't think that you cared to know him. You know that you

never could tolerate his uncle, and this man is exactly like him, only a great deal worse." The accusations poured out breathlessly.

Dr. Edmister looked faintly amused. "I am not deaf," he observed. "Despite my advanced age I hear excellently, and I am also," he went on, with a crafty eye upon his daughter's face, "still capable of controlling my acquaintance with an eye single to my own pleasure."

Katherine looked abashed, but an almost imperceptible lift of the corner of her father's mustache taught her her bearings, and she climbed recklessly up on the arm of his chair. "Traitor!" she whispered in measured syllables into his ear. "Did you see the box of chessmen standing on that man's window ledge?"

"I did," said her father with immovable face. "They were of old ivory, and quaintly carved. I saw them."

"You called, of course. When do you play?"

Dr. Edmister laughed. "Mr. Proctor is coming up here to-night. We may try conclusions in a game or so. I don't know. Mr. Proctor has been well trained, but he is a young man, and youth is volatile. Chess is a game for old age and the fireside. I'm badly out of practice, but I don't know that I'm afraid of the result."

Katherine slipped from the chair and walked to the veranda rail. "I won't see him. I shan't have to, shall I?" she asked.

Dr. Edmister looked at her curiously; her voice had learned a new note. "What is it, Kather-

ine?" he asked, as he disjointed his rods and put them back in their cases. "What 's Mr. Proctor's particular item of offense? You 're not jealous of the chess, are you?"

"Jealous of him! Hardly. But he 's rude and sneering. He called Mr. Ellis a lamb."

"A lamb!"

"Adrien Lauzeone said so. And I saw him laugh at the church at the wedding, when Nelly Peterson played 'Rescue the Perishing.'"

Dr. Edmister looked resigned. "If you 've sufficient command of your native English to tell this story coherently, Katherine, I shall be grateful. My imagination has its reserves. Spare them."

Katherine gave an unwilling smile. "I suppose you 'll laugh too," she said, as she told her story, "but I don't mind your laughter. You don't sneer. Why, we both laugh, but it 's different — we 're part of it. Mr. Proctor does n't belong here. What business has he to come from outside and show us how queer we are? It is n't generous!" she concluded defiantly.

Her father leaned against the rail, and listened with tolerant enjoyment. His height and bearing gave him a look of austere distinction that his gray hair accented, and his daughter's mind responded to the look of command in his face.

"Mr. Proctor may be the malefactor that your tone implies," he said at last, "but you have proved to me only that he has an appreciative mind. I think the better of him, — that quality being, as I

have heard you remark, not altogether common in Wilsonport."

Katherine looked stubborn. "I don't like him," she persisted.

"You may like him better when you meet him. I found him civil enough, certainly, if that is the article of your complaint."

"I have met him."

Dr. Edmister looked up sharply. "You have? You have n't told me of that, my daughter."

"There was n't much to tell. Yes, I suppose that I ought to have told you; I will now. I suppose you 'll laugh at this, too." Her tone did not invite amusement.

She was her father's daughter; so she told a story too well to spare herself in the telling, but Dr. Edmister did not laugh.

"Why did you go in when you knew that Mr. Proctor was there?" he asked perplexedly.

Katherine bit her lip. "I had to apologize, and I wanted to have it over with."

"But why an apology? You say that you dislike him."

The girl looked troubled at his density. "Don't you see," she explained, "that was just why I had to apologize? I had made up my mind never to like him, nor to have anything to do with him; then I put myself in the wrong by making that silly speech, so that I was as much at fault as he. I had to apologize so that I could start fair."

Dr. Edmister gave her a moment's puzzled study. "I am afraid that I shall have to send you

away," he said shortly. "You will lose your sense of humor if you stay here longer, and you can't afford that. A sense of humor," he observed didactically to the air at large, "is, after all, the only heritage that the ages have left us — is all that distinguishes us from the savage. No, Katherine, beware! Lose your sense of humor, your grasp of the point of view, and I will put you in moccasins."

The girl's eyes grew stormy. "All that does n't change my opinion of Mr. Proctor," she insisted, a break in her voice. "I don't care if it was funny. Mr. Cole is n't funny, and he laughed at Mr. Cole's wedding. I can't stand it for anybody to laugh at Mr. Cole — funny or not!" The sob reached her throat, but she held it there.

"Funny?" expostulated her father. "Who said that it was funny? Choose your words, child, choose your words. Don't be a barbarian in speech, even though you do live like a squirrel or a Chippewa. Humor, remember, is a generic term. Now, fun — There 's Mrs. Green with Chevalier. Keep him away from the veranda, Katherine; he 'll tangle my lines!"

Mrs. Green climbed the veranda steps, laughing. Her ample sides were formed for laughter, and responded with frequency to their manifest rôle. "Ephraim 's out trimmin' the hedge by the chicken coop, again, doctor," she said. "I tell him that 's his knittin' work, trimmin' that hedge; he does it whenever he gets kind of worked up, just as I 'd sit down to round off the toe of a

stockin'. And he wants to know whether it ain't a good time to kill that old goose. He ain't a mite of use to us, and he 's got a dreadful appetite for corn."

Dr. Edmister frowned. "This is n't the season for roast goose," he said somewhat shortly, "and he is n't doing any harm. You should mention the matter in the autumn."

Mrs. Green looked comfortably resigned to the expected. "I did," she said, with a placid nod. "You know you said that we better wait because the feathers would be better in the spring. No, the goose ain't no harm, except that it kind of bothers Ephraim to have him around. He sort of litters up the chicken coop, he 's so big. Ephraim would like to have the geese and hens all one size, so they 'd look neater on the perches. You 'll have to look out for Chevalier, Katherine. He snapped at the berry-boy real vicious to-day."

Chevalier, who had jumped into the circle of Katherine's arms, lifted a quivering nose at the sound of his name, then pushed closer to his refuge. The inordinate length of bushy tail, which he carried curled over his back like a squirrel's, spoke his dubious race, but there was nothing mongrel in his mental composition, and the eyes hidden under Katherine's arm were hungrily questioning and tender.

The girl caressed him absently. "Chevalier 's a patrician to his paws," she said. "He does n't like bare feet. I 'd like to know where he formulated his conventions. Mrs. Green, Mr. Proctor

— from the mill, you know — is coming to spend the evening with father. I 'm going to take my books and sit with you. May I ? "

" Land, yes ! You 're always welcome ; you know that ; and Ephraim lots on having you come to our room, but " — Mrs. Green turned to Dr. Edmister, and looked interrogative.

When the lash seemed needful, Dr. Edmister could use it with a calm disdain that older wills than Katherine's had quailed before.

" If my daughter may sit with you this evening," he said with stately courtesy, " I shall be grateful. Mr. Proctor is, I believe, unused to children, and I wish him to have a pleasant visit."

CHAPTER V

THE GAME OF CHESS

JUNE is but fickle in the north-land, and the forest path, teeming with radiant color in the afternoon, was a maze of elfin shadowings when Mr. Proctor climbed the hill.

He climbed it rapidly, for his one talk with Dr. Edmister had stirred a wish for more. The stormy Katherine he had dropped from his thought, now that Dr. Edmister had proved companionable. The girl had been of moment only when she seemed an index of her father's mind.

Dr. Edmister met him at the door, and welcomed him with kindly phrase. The large low room, aglow from the red-shaded lamp upon the reading table, was simple of furnishing, but the books and pictures that crowded its walls pointed sharp contrasts to the life that lay in the village below. It is sometimes good to have been lonely — when the loneliness is over. Dr. Edmister's eyes, trained in the lore of facial changes, missed nothing of the alert enjoyment in his guest's look, and it was food to his one vanity as a scholar. The two men were strangers; but with the chessboard between them and the books about them, they were perilously near to becoming sudden friends.

The game progressed with varying changes for two hours; then an unwary move of Mr. Proctor's left the field to his adversary.

Dr. Edmister pushed the board to one side with an ejaculation of content. "It is a pleasure to win from you," he said, "but one that I must make the most of this time. I shall not have it often. You have been playing to-night with half your mind elsewhere; when you recall that half, the score will be reversed."

Mr. Proctor smiled his denial. "It is good of you to make excuse, but I was not inattentive, only stupid. I 've had to eat and sleep mill for a month, and, given a rut, my mind 's not a detachable organ."

The doctor looked sudden comprehension. "Are things going smoothly?" he asked, pushing back in his easy chair.

"Fairly. It 's new work, and I don't know that I understand my material."

"Men or lumber?"

"Both; though, so far as the men are concerned, I 've a good superintendent."

Dr. Edmister balanced a pipe on his hand, offering another to his guest. "Yes, Cole 's a good man," he presently said; "bigoted, perhaps, but capable and hard working. Are these labor troubles likely to affect you?"

Mr. Proctor smoked for a moment. "I hardly know," he answered. There was a new inflection in his voice. The word "labor" brought to him again the burden he had for the moment laid

aside, — a sordid burden, to his thinking, — and a gossamer of reserve blew across his consciousness. "There 's an undercurrent at work," he went on; "just what, I 'm uncertain. But I 've not given it much thought; I doubt that it 's important. It can't be that these men read the papers, and labor troubles are largely imitative. Then remember that I 've a tower of Babel down there. Ten nationalities would hardly agree on one plan."

Dr. Edmister studied his guest. "But Babel had a strife of tongues," he warned. "Diversity of blood may still mean unity. The case of servant against master is an old one; it 's a stronger bond than any tie of race."

The younger man smiled. "They 're an uncouth people," his hand brushed away the subject as if it soiled him, "and are probably kinder in intent than their words would seem. Certainly the sin of dissimulation is not theirs."

The doctor's face was non-committal. "I am much out of touch with any active phase of the village life," he said at length. "It has seemed wise to me to hold myself to the strictly neutral rôle of physician. The souls and mentalities of the people are already cared for — with zeal, if not discretion. You 've met Paul Livingstone?"

"Only casually. He comes to the mill a good deal, and talks with the men."

Dr. Edmister caught the restraint in the other's voice, and answered it. "Livingstone won't trouble you," he said with easy optimism. "He may be rude — he 's a zealot, and has the limitations of

his environment — but he 's conscientious. Then, too, he 's a religious fanatic, not a labor reformer."

The younger man looked thoughtful. "The two seem oddly mingled," he said, as if formulating his thought for the first time. "Religion, labor, personal antagonism, — all seem names for one motive. I overheard a young Swede yesterday haranguing a group of men at the lunch hour, and it was hard to tell what moved his audience most, — his arguments for the eight-hour law, his lurid picture of the doom of sinners, or his personal arraignment of me."

"Personal?"

"The sins of the forbears." Mr. Proctor's smile was enigmatic. "I 'm less an individual to these men, I find, than the exponent of a principle. Oh, the boy was eloquent on the general idea that white men should not submit to the whip of the overseer — myself as overseer — that slavery should not be wiped out at the South to flourish in the free air of the North. He was really effective — in view of his audience. I was sorry that the prejudice against listening in hiding prevented my hearing more. He stopped, of course, when he saw me."

"Who was the man?"

"One of the hands in the yards. I had n't noticed him till yesterday. Torstenson is his name."

Dr. Edmister whistled softly. "Yngve Torstenson!" he ejaculated. "That 's bad. I 'll have to set Karen after him. That 's a good family, industrious and frugal. Ole, the father, is as

straight as a die. I wonder who 's been after the boy! Go to the house and talk to him. He 's a weak-willed youngster — oh, I 've known him since his kite and marble days — but he 's quick-witted. It would pay you to get hold of him."

Mr. Proctor bowed absent assent. "Don't look around, Dr. Edmister," he said evenly, "but there 's a man's face looking in at the end window. I 've been watching him for some minutes. You 'll have to turn quickly to see him; he dodges when you move."

Dr. Edmister leaned languidly back in his chair, then whirled with the recoil of a released spring. The face in the window was too slow, and the doctor gave an exclamation of relief and annoyance.

"The impertinent idiot!" he exclaimed under his breath, and going to the door opened it with a jerk.

"Adrien," he called, "Adrien, come here!" The crash of breaking boughs was the only answer, and his forehead seamed with annoyance. "The most unaccountable place, and the most unaccountable people," he grumbled. "That was Adrien Lauzeone. The young man needs a lesson; he 's an odd lad."

"I know Adrien," said Mr. Proctor somewhat briefly. "I thought it was he at first, then concluded I was mistaken. He looked so" — He took up his pipe, and left the sentence unfinished.

"So unpleasant?" supplied the doctor.

"Well, so far from amiable, at the least," Mr.

Proctor admitted. "What do you suppose was the matter?"

"Anything from a toothache to a north wind," said the doctor easily. "These Belgians show their peasant blood in their lack of self-control. They fly in a black rage over nothing, and they all look like stage brigands. He may have wanted Katherine to help him with his lessons. Katherine is my daughter, Mr. Proctor, — hardly an old enough daughter to dispense the courtesies of the home, — she is still a schoolgirl, — but too old for the license of a child. Hence you have not met her this evening." The sudden reserve in the doctor's tone struck the first dissonance.

"But I have met your daughter — at George Cole's," said the young man with an effort. The comprehension in his host's face made the courteous speech that was in his mind seem insincere, and he withheld it.

Dr. Edmister looked up, and amusement canceled his momentary annoyance. "Yes, she told me." The emphasis that he gave the words stood for the explanation he forbore to make. "I 'm sorry if she seemed discourteous, but remember she is a child, and the life you laughed at is the only one that she has known."

Mr. Proctor's hand stopped him. "I am the one who should apologize. But did she feel that I laughed at her? I assure you" —

"Not at her; that would have been much less serious." The doctor smiled with reminiscent enjoyment. "No, her tale was not of her own

wrongs," and he repeated the conversation of the afternoon. He told it brilliantly, and it assumed importance. That he was talking to a responsive listener did not in the least increase the pungency of his narration; he would have talked with equal fluency to Mrs. Green. The mind that he was in reality addressing was that of the woman who had been his wife, and though its quick response had failed to answer his for many years, he carried the memory of its companionship with him, and was, despite his surroundings, reasonably happy and content.

Mr. Proctor listened intently, but with less amusement than the tale deserved. "She told it from my standpoint," he said perplexedly, "and gave me the best of it. Yet she was vexed."

Dr. Edmister sobered at the gravity of the other's tone.

"Don't try to reconcile a child's moods," he protested. "She is an irrational little piece, and needs a woman's companionship. She would n't have been so defensive if it had been any one but George Cole. She 's true to her sex in her bolstering of idols."

"I saw that she was fond of Mr. Cole. His wish seemed law."

"There 's a story behind that," said the doctor, with a change of look. "Some years ago — four, to be accurate — we had malignant diphtheria in the village. It was a black time. We were a hundred miles from a hospital. There were forty cases in one week. I don't often talk of that week, for

I know that if I had been ten men instead of one — well, I did what I could. But I had two helpers — two only — George Cole and Heinrich at the lighthouse." The memory drove the doctor to the window; it was dark without, but he looked for a time in silence. "In all this village," he resumed, turning finally, "in all that time of fear and horror, those two, alone, quitted themselves like men. The others — the few who had semblance of manhood and tried to make excuse — said they had children. Heinrich has a crippled child, a girl, and motherless. Perhaps Katherine has some excuse."

The younger man said nothing. He had seen Heinrich's crippled daughter, and the memory made the reality of the doctor's story uncomfortably keen.

"However," said the doctor at length, — he had come back to the table, and his tone was light, — "that is a bygone tale. There are good men in the village; yes, good men, as the warp of humanity runs. I told the story to explain my daughter's attitude. She is an impressionable child — which is one reason why I climbed this hilltop for a home. I saw your wonder as I drew you in from the darkness."

"I marveled how your patients reached you."

"Wait till you see the path in the daytime. There 's healing in its beauty. As to my patients, I have the ailments of the people well catalogued. I know, as a rule, where I 'll be wanted."

"But in case of accidents — at the mill, for instance?"

"One stroke of the schoolhouse bell means an accident. Not a child in the township but knows that, and could call me. Surgical cases are pitifully common, thanks to your saws. But enough of that. It 's not good fuel for an evening pipe."

They smoked for a time in silence, their thoughts busy with themselves and with each other. Somewhat of the gracious calm of a great forest falls on those who live within its thrall.

Mr. Proctor roused himself first, with a guilty awakening to the lateness of the hour.

"I must" — he began, but was cut short by the clanging stroke of a bell. One stroke! No resonance softened the rude warning, and it tore the soft quiet of the night.

Mr. Proctor's eyes leaped to his host. They met no answering look. Dr. Edmister was already at the door, his medicine case in hand.

"Bring the lantern!" he called back. "It hangs on a nail by the front door. Put out the lights, lock the door, and bring the key!" The last words came faintly from the distance.

Mr. Proctor obeyed. Some yards from the bottom of the trail he overtook the doctor. The elder man nodded, — both were too breathless for speech, — and they pushed on, side by side.

"Where do we go?" asked Mr. Proctor when breathing became less a pain.

"A messenger should be here; there he is now."

A man waiting at the foot of the path started forward. The swinging lantern showed a short twisted figure and bushy hair.

"Come, Lars," said the doctor, with no break in the swing of his stride. "Who is it? Where?"

"It's Yngve, sir — Yngve Torstenson. And he's hurt in his head by — he was knocked down, sir. We was at a meeting over the feed store."

"Torstenson's?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he badly hurt?"

"He's awful bloody," said the man fearfully. "I could n't see plain." He drew nearer, and his voice essayed a whisper. "Will you send him home first?" His crooked finger indicated Mr. Proctor.

The doctor did not answer, but he laid his hand on Mr. Proctor's arm with a pressure which said "stay," and the quickened speed of his step taxed his companion's endurance.

The stairs that led to the loft over the feed store were in the back of the building, and as the trio picked their way among the sacks of grain and flour, the swelling roar of voices in the room above sounded ominous.

The doctor led the way up the narrow stair in strides that seemed to scorn the intervening medium of steps, and entered a low-raftered room, dimly lighted with smoking lamps. The men — there were too many to count at a glance — were gathered in a huddled circle about a figure lying in the centre of the room, and they started at the doctor's approach. He gave them a quick look, but their eyes had left him to dwell on Mr. Proctor. Plainly this last arrival was, to their minds, an uninvited guest,

and the doctor's look of command grew more pronounced.

"Proctor," he called authoritatively, "close the door, and see that no one goes out! Stand back there, men!" and he was on his knees beside the figure on the floor.

Yngve Torstenson had somewhat of his sister's coloring, but the blood-smirched head now lying on Heinrich's arm bore little suggestion of the blonde beauty of Karen's face.

The doctor looked grave. "Bring a lantern," he commanded shortly, and the examination began.

The strained hush of the room was broken only by the half-strangled breathing of the men, and the doctor's voice, which at length ended the silence, sounded startlingly abrupt.

"It 's only" — he began as he rose, then came to a full stop, and studied the faces about him with deliberation. "You 've given me some exercise," he said. There was something in the glances that met his that hardened his voice. "It 's not your fault that I have n't a pretty surgical case on hand. A little more to the right and — Who did it?"

The men made no answer; a few turned away.

"Is it bad, doctor?" It was Heinrich's voice, from his place on the floor; he still held young Torstenson's head in his arms.

The doctor's glance softened. "Bad? No. It 's only a scalp wound, and he 'll be out in a day, but" — his voice growing sterner — "I want to know who did it. It was a good job. Don't be ashamed of your handiwork. I did n't know there

was a man of you strong enough to knock Yngve Torstenson down. Speak out!"

"I did it, doctor." The voice was again Heinrich's, and the doctor started.

"Heinrich!" he exclaimed. Few people in Wilsonport had heard that tone in Dr. Edmister's voice. It held both protest and appeal.

The wounded man opened his eyes. "Don't you" — he began, but Dr. Edmister stooped to lay a hand upon his lips.

"Lie still, Yngve," he said. "We'll take you home in a minute. Now, men," — he straightened himself once more, — "is this true?"

The men before him nodded a slow assent. To Mr. Proctor, in the background, their reluctance seemed sullen.

Dr. Edmister's look dropped. "You say that you struck this boy, Heinrich?" The incredulity of his tone would not be stilled.

"Yes, doctor."

"How?"

Heinrich's glance flinched at the brevity of the question, but he replied in kind. "I knocked him down. His head hit the edge of the woodbox."

The woodbox was built of heavy jagged timbers, and Mr. Proctor looked at it with shrinking. Yet Heinrich's eyes were asking him for reassurance, and he smiled. Later he wondered at his swift response, for the scene seemed useless and degrading.

The doctor's gaze in the mean time had not stirred from the man on the floor. "You might have killed him, Heinrich."

"I know," Heinrich answered quietly, and raising his eyes he met the doctor's glance. The two men studied each other long, and the doctor turned away with a look that made him younger.

"Take that door off its hinges," he said to Lars Olson. "We 'll use it for a stretcher. Now, men, — don't leave, any of you, — how did it happen?" There was no answer. Again the heavy faces turned aside. Dr. Edmister eyed them mercilessly. "I 'm tired of this nonsense." His voice was growing trumpet clear. "Xavier Lauzeone, you 're a man of sense. What does this mean?"

The Belgian turned an immovable face. "I have forgotten," he answered.

The doctor drew his breath through his teeth, and resumed his scrutiny. Each face bore the same answer. "You have forgotten," he repeated slowly. "Have you forgotten, Heinrich?"

Heinrich again raised his steady eyes. "Yes, doctor," he answered gravely, "I have forgotten."

The doctor's years had taught his face control. He looked across at Mr. Proctor, and the ghost of a smile showed its white shimmer in his eyes. Why this dark importance? Comedy hung close upon their heels to-night.

Mr. Proctor's look was guarded. "Mr. Livingstone may be able to tell us something," he suggested. His bow brought the schoolmaster into sudden view. "His memory — trained, of course — may be less treacherous."

Dr. Edmister exclaimed, "Livingstone! I did n't see you." He checked the welcome on his lips. "Surely you, too" —

"Have not forgotten?" Livingstone caught at the words defiantly. "No. And what I have not forgotten I wish to tell."

The men closed about him. "No!" they shouted. "Keep still! Keep still, on your life!"

The schoolmaster did not flinch. "I do not 'keep still on my life,'" he said impressively, "but because I am not sure that the time is ripe for speech." His eyes surprised the amusement in Mr. Proctor's glance, and his breath came quickly. Then the mill-owner turned away negligent, smiling, and the doctor interposed.

"Mr. Livingstone may perhaps recall the purpose of this meeting," he observed. "His presence here proves it of importance."

"It was a political meeting," said Mr. Livingstone. His voice was studiously reticent. He would give Mr. Proctor no opportunity to repeat that look of half-wearied disdain.

"Politics and broken heads," murmured the doctor. "Consistent enough. Help me here, some of you men! You can take this young man on a stretcher in state. The exertion will be good for you. Your memories need a tonic."

The alacrity of the men spoke their joy at release. Evidently they found the air of mystery heavy breathing. The doctor followed, but turned at the top of the stairs.

"Xavier Lauzeone!" he took the Belgian by the sleeve, and motioned to the room within. "Look at Adrien. This is no place for him. You are shrewd enough to know better. Send him

away to school before he gets into mischief. He came to my house to-night; stared into my windows, and ran like a thief when I saw him. Send him away."

Lauzeone's eyes justified Dr. Edmister's epithet. "There 's mischief in schools, too," he grumbled, with a shrug, "and when Adrien went to your house to-night Proctor was there first. Why go in — tell me!"

The doctor turned away. "I 'll tell you that you 're playing with sharp tools when you use Mr. Proctor's name lightly," he said; "but look out for your own hurts. Only follow my advice with Adrien."

Mr. Proctor, meanwhile, had left the building, and Dr. Edmister hurried after him. Yet it was a moment before either spoke.

"Well?" the doctor said.

The young man laughed. "I am much your debtor." There was new elasticity in his voice, and the doctor looked at him.

"You are not curious?" he asked.

Proctor shook his head. "Is n't it obvious?" he asked in turn. "Men of this stamp — they 're children — crave melodrama. They are driven by their life here to create their own stage illusions. What does it mean to you?"

The doctor was grave. "It means that you have other games of chess to play," he said slowly. "Human pawns is an old simile; it comes to me now."

CHAPTER VI

WHILE THE SUN SHONE

THE next morning dawned cloudless and calm. No curl of white broke the beryl-tinted surface of the lake, where rounding billows swayed like giant cradles, and the plash of the swells on the sand was murmurous as a dove's note.

Mr. Proctor stood at his open window exulting in the caress of the air. The crude hard outlines of the settlement, that had beat upon his nerves like hammer strokes on metal, were softened to beauty in this flood of amber light, and an unreasoning feeling of home comfort and content wiped out the memory of the night before. The air pulsed with peace.

Jessie brought in the breakfast with a grudging curve of the lips that strove hard to be a smile.

"It 's a weather breeder," she said, after dismal scrutiny of the glowing out of doors, then added, — less as an afterthought than as if the facts bore dark and related significance, — "Karen Torstenson 's been hanging round the gate waiting for you."

Mr. Proctor left his half-finished breakfast, and went with quick steps down the plank walk that led through the sand. Why Karen? His thoughts

dragged unwillingly back to the feed loft and its sensational mystery. Were here more complications?

Karen greeted him with timorous dimples. "Yngve told me to come," she prefaced with unwonted hesitation.

"Is he" — The man stopped. He could ask no questions till he knew how far the girl's information went.

"Oh, he 's all right," Karen said easily, "but he wanted me to see you. No, I can't come in. Are you going to the mill? I 'll go down that way."

"Let us go to the beach," Mr. Proctor suggested. The mill looked undesirably near. "And now what can I do for Yngve?"

The girl's tongue was not ready. "It 's — it 's — Heinrich," she stammered. "You won't arrest" —

The man caught the last word, and it repelled him. "Arrest him?" he echoed.

"Oh, no, no!" In her eagerness the girl placed a hand upon his arm. "That 's what Yngve is afraid of. You must n't arrest Heinrich. Yngve said so. He said I must coax you not to do it."

"Coax me? My dear child," — in their absorption the patronizing epithet passed unnoticed, — "I 've nothing to do with it. I could n't arrest Heinrich if I wished. Your brother must want something else. What is it?"

"No, that was all. Will you promise not to do anything? You are the boss. I 'll tell Yngve you promised."

Her pleading flushed her cheeks newly, and Mr. Proctor met temptation to magnify his prerogatives. He vanquished it, with a sigh for his own moderation.

"Yes, I 'll promise, if you wish. But what was it all about, Miss Karen?"

At the word "promise" the subject had blown from Karen's mind like thistle-down. "I don't know," she said indifferently. She turned a cheek whose silken pink and white argued the futility of aught but love and laughter. "But Yngve says it 's all right."

Mr. Proctor smiled at the period in her tone. Complications had no place here, and his spirits again tuned to the morning. "I had a sister too," he said. "Let us sit down here on the sand," — he was in the clutch of an impulse, and he gave it sway, — "and I will show you her picture."

"I can't." Karen looked rueful. "I 've got to go to school. This is the last week, and then I 'll be out for good. Father says I 'm too big to go any more."

"What will you do then? Go away to school?"

She looked faintly amused at the impropriety of the suggestion. "A grown girl like me? Oh, I 'll stay at home. Father says he 'll pay me if I 'll help tend the store."

Mr. Proctor winced, and hurried his sister's picture to his pocket. His good sense seemed ever at war with his traditions. He was tired of being a battle-ground.

They found Mr. Livingstone standing at the schoolhouse door, Katherine beside him. The girl held a paper, covered with figures, in her hand, and her face was dark with doubt. "Oh, why should A insist on giving the square root of the *n*th division of his income to B?" they heard her lament. "I 'm sure it does n't sound nourishing."

The schoolmaster did not hear her. He was watching the approaching figures, and his closed hands showed white knuckles.

"Good-morning, Miss Torstenson," he said. He gave Mr. Proctor a nod that was a cross between denial of his presence and resentment of it. "You have already kept us waiting."

Katherine's eyebrows betrayed surprise, and her face flushed. The next moment she slipped her hand into Karen's.

"You and Mr. Proctor came just in time to save Mr. Livingstone," she said with a smile that dwelt longest on the schoolmaster. "Algebra and I are not to be recommended — in combination. Will you show Mr. Proctor that problem? I 'm sure he 'll agree with me that A squandered his substance in riotous generosity."

There was deference in her voice that made her nonsense winning, and complacence crowded annoyance in Livingstone's face.

"You are perhaps a mathematician?" he asked of Mr. Proctor. His tone was once more *ex cathedra*. His grasp upon his regained dignity was none the less secure that he owed it to a girl's slight hand.

Mr. Proctor smiled his denial and turned away, but Karen followed a few paces.

"I hope that you will be happy here," she said, and she held out her hand.

The man looked at her. Her cotton dress was as blue as her eyes, and the sunshine strayed in her hair.

"I am happy," he answered with unnecessary vehemence, and because he used the present tense he spoke the truth.

At his office he found Dr. Edmister, who greeted him with a comradeship that under more usual circumstances years alone would have had force to justify.

"What have you learned of last night?" he asked.

"Nothing — or rather, only that Yngve's mood is pacific."

"Yes, I've just seen Yngve. He has an exalted vision of your estate, and is evidently afraid of an investigation. I've been walking through the mill, and the mental air is balmy — suspiciously so. That affair last night seems to have been a thunderstorm that cleared the air."

Mr. Proctor drew a long breath. "I think it's the weather. We're all more amiable this morning. This air is too strenuous most of the time to admit of taking life lightly."

"It is a fine day — which brings me to my errand. I've a call to make near Birch Creek. Would you like to drive out there?"

"Yes, I'll go with pleasure. Can you wait till

I see Cole? If you go near the shingle mill, I 'll speak to Detiere. I have n't been out there but once since I came. Detiere needs very little supervision, and I found work piled up here."

The doctor nodded. "We pass the mill. I 'll drop you there, and make my call."

Mr. Proctor came back from his interview with his superintendent with an amused perplexity in his smile. "You 're right," he commented. "The men are ingratiatingly anxious to say 'good-morning.' I find this sudden popularity upsetting."

"I don't like it." The doctor's troubled look was more emphatic than his speech. "I liked the men's gruffness better. This cordiality marks contrasts; they 've something to cover. However, make the most of the change."

"I doubt that their moods have so much significance," said Mr. Proctor easily. "I 'm an optimist. I still think that it 's the weather."

"I hope you 're right." The doctor's frown relaxed. "I 'm growing old and suspicious. I 've been too much alone."

They drove through the village briskly, for ten miles lay between Wilsonport and Birch Creek. Near the schoolhouse they passed Adrien Lauzeone, his face set with the introspective look of one to whom reveries are realities.

The doctor checked his horse. "You 're late, Adrien."

The boy lifted an absorbed face. "It will not matter. Dr. Edmister, I am going to the university in the fall. Father promised."

"Good! Good!" The doctor leaned over, and laid a hand on Adrien's shoulder. "Make the most of it, my lad."

"Why did I call Adrien 'lad'!" he ejaculated as they drove on. "That is a trick of old age. I can't keep Katherine young by dwarfing her companions. Well, I'm glad that's settled. It is one responsibility the less."

"Or one the greater?"

Dr. Edmister turned at the tone. "You think his going unwise?"

Mr. Proctor's eyes and answer evaded the issue. "We were talking of responsibilities. Adrien's children may be the better, but what of him? The transitional generation has a hard time."

"It's been bred to hard times," said the doctor with lessening protest, "and it has unwearied brain and iron muscle. That's my optimism, if you like. I have faith."

They were now in the forest, which opened to them with the coolness of early morning. The grass-grown ribbon that formed the road twined through tree arches, and the sunlight dropped in splashes through weaving boughs. Save where the roadside gave them freedom, the moss-fringed pines grew close packed as ranks of soldiery, and the moist ground beneath held in its mould the records of a day before the birth of time. At intervals the forest wall swayed inward to give foothold to a clearing, — a few acres where blackened stumps disputed with the stunted grain. Each clearing had its house, and at the sound of wheels, the log-

framed doors blossomed children — here flaxen as the descendants of vikings; there dark-browed as Attila. They beleaguered the doctor's way, and he called them by name, — Hendreka, François, Odil, Knud.

"They are my children," he said in response to Mr. Proctor's surprise. "I helped bring them into the world, and they look to me to take them through it. I am their visible Providence."

"The Detieres live here," he remarked, as they passed an unkempt clearing. "Did you say that Louis had charge of your shingle mill?"

"Yes."

"Who put him there?"

"My uncle, I think. Possibly Cole. He was there when I came. You think he's not trustworthy?"

The doctor flicked the roadside with his whip. "He's a handsome animal. I did n't suppose that he could keep sober long enough to draw his pay. I've never seen him work."

"He's drunk every Sunday, Cole tells me, but he is a marvel of sobriety while the mill's running. And he not only works himself, but he drives the men. They seem afraid of him."

"I've no doubt that they are. He has an ill-omened reputation for skill with his knife. Do you know what a set of men you have here?"

"I know a little about it — more than I care to hear. They tell me it's bedlam on Saturday nights. In the mean time the men cut my shingles." Mr. Proctor's tone spoke frank distaste.

The doctor turned in his seat, and looked several things that he did not say.

"You are an epicure still," he commented at length; and when the young man ventured to protest, he dropped the matter with a smile.

"I 've seen Detiere with Ferdinante Lauzeone more than I like," the doctor said later. "Do you know the girl?"

"I think not. Is she Adrien's sister?"

"Yes — a year or two older. I wish that she could be sent to school instead of Adrien. But that the family would n't consider. The male enthroned is the motto of these people. Ferdinante is a handsome woman, as blonde as Adrien is dark. I admit that she and Louis Detiere together suggest that the gods have come down from Olympus — and left their brains behind. Detiere is as good to look at as a leopard — and is very like one."

The settlement of Birch Creek proved the desolation man can accomplish. Charred stumps had been hacked away to make room for a huddle of buildings, and the opening was wind-swept and dreary. A mill and some dozen frame houses formed the village, and the buildings crowded together with unwholesome intimacy, their dark timbers forbidding and unclean.

"A squalid hole!" ejaculated Proctor, as they drove along. "There is your leopard, doctor. More like a Mrs. Jarley's Indian, I should say."

Leopard or Indian, Detiere's was a theatrical figure — six feet of hard-knitted bone and muscle

erect and sinewed as a bronze cast. At sight of the two men his strong white teeth gleamed in a smile. He was proud of the mill.

"What 's wrong at the schoolhouse, Detiere?" asked the doctor, as he stopped for Mr. Proctor on his return. "Who boarded up the door?"

"Me." The man's teeth showed undesirably now, and his swart face grew crimson.

"Oh!" said the doctor, with curving inflections. "What 's the trouble?"

Detiere clenched an iron-muscled hand and struck the door-casing. "That man Livingstone," he said, with oaths. "He comes here and has meetings. He makes me trouble. There is no school. So! When he comes again he find that I make fast the door, and ask me why. See?"

"Yes, I think that I see," returned the doctor. The mental picture that he saw moved his ready humor. "So Livingstone 's been giving you temperance lectures. Well, I never denied his bravery, though I have questioned his judgment. You 'd better take your board down, Detiere. Mr. Livingstone is going away next week, and I may want to come and talk to you myself."

Detiere's expression altered. "You say he go away? And you say you come to talk to us?" He picked up a board. "Then I do this to the board at the door!" He snapped the wood in his hands as if it were a shaving. "I do this for the doctor. See?" The Belgian's smile was dazzling.

"My acquaintance with leopards is superficial," said Proctor, as they drove home, "but I suppose

that their good-will is to be esteemed. You evidently have Detiere's confidence."

The doctor slapped his reins sharply. "I don't want it," he protested. "The feeling is not reciprocal. I prefer distrust to his liking. It is more of a compliment, to my thinking."

CHAPTER VII

THE POT OF GOLD

"I THINK it is the weather," Mr. Proctor had said, and the weeks succeeding confirmed his carelessly good-humored faith.

"This lull is an anti-climax," he complained to Dr. Edmister. "All that travesty of mystery when I first came prepared me for a stirring life. This is as sleepy as vacation time."

And summer was vacation time in very truth. Wilsonport's days were yellow sunlight, its nights were crystal flashing stars, and the calendar of the weeks was written to the melody of bird song and lapping water.

It was not alone that the gray earth smiled. All animate life crept out at the touch of the sun and lived to the uttermost the brief days between the frosts. The forest was aflutter with wings and moved to the soft stir of gentle-footed creatures that came and went among its shadows. Even self-absorbed humanity responded; the village sitting-rooms grew musty through disuse while their owners spent the golden moments of their leisure on doorstep or beach.

No wonder that the days drifted happily. These weeks of outdoor life were the solvent that re-

moved much of the year's accumulation of rancor and misunderstanding, and life became less arduous in plan and meaning. Mouths curved to readier laughter in the softer air, and Mr. Proctor met no unfriendliness; more, he found looks of greeting. He was perhaps unaware of how warmly he smiled in turn. The witchery of the solstice was in his blood, and the life that he had called "uncouth" caught transient beauty.

At the mill the men worked lazily, but with apparent content. If the meeting in the feed loft had had significance, its force seemed spent.

But Dr. Edmister shook his head.

"A lull is n't a calm, Proctor," he said. "It 's merely a negative condition. There 's the languor of summer to reckon with, but I 'm convinced there 's something more. Lifting logs and lumber for eleven hours does n't fit a man for thinking. Watch your men. You 'll see that they are too tired at night to talk, much less to foster an independent idea. I don't mean that they have n't brains, — only men of force would attempt a pioneer's life in this wilderness, — but physical exhaustion literally compels them to take their ideas at second hand. The question is, Who has been doing their thinking for them? Whoever he is, he 's keeping quiet for a time."

The men were sitting on Dr. Edmister's veranda, looking off over the village. They sat together often now, and Mr. Proctor's feet had learned each winding of the woodland trail. The silence that fell after the last remark spoke loudly of the comradeship between them.

"He may be away?" asked Proctor at last. He made no excuse for the hiatus. Indeed his thoughts were elsewhere, idly following a blue-clad figure that had left the village for the path along the beach. The hue suggested Miss Torstenson's holiday attire. Why not follow? It was Sunday afternoon, and such was the custom of the village. The summer weeks had taught him a somewhat detailed knowledge of Karen's wardrobe, and he could not be mistaken now.

The doctor studied his finger tips, unconscious of the other's lapse of thought. "So you think that Livingstone was the 'God of the Machine'?" he answered. "Well, it looks as if you were right, but what did he — what does he — hope to gain? I repeat that I've always thought him honest. I suppose that I'm unreasonable in this matter," he went on, with a short laugh, "but the fact is, that so long as I send Katherine to the village school, I'm forced to believe the best of the teacher. It's the attitude of the ostrich, I'll admit, but I don't know what else to do with Katherine, so have no refuge but to hide my head so long as the sand holds out."

Mr. Proctor laughed at the plaint in his friend's tone and dropped Karen from his consciousness.

"Why not make Livingstone the pupil?" he asked. Katherine had just passed, and the memory of her severely composed face added spice to the suggestion. He seldom saw the doctor's daughter, but when he did her eyes assured him that he was a cumbrance to the ground. "That arrange-

ment would be much to the young man's advantage," he pursued, "and would keep your daughter busy. I 've seen Miss Katherine's books. It can't be that Livingstone can teach her anything, and I think that she 'd enjoy implanting a few needed lessons in his mind."

The doctor nodded appreciatively. "Implanting lessons would suit her perfectly," he said. "She 's at the age to be didactic to her finger tips. But you 're mistaken about Livingstone ; he can teach her something. Her heaven-sent density in regard to anything that concerns number is my salvation, for she has the utmost respect for what she cannot understand. Now mathematics is Livingstone's strong tower, and so long as the theorems hold out Katherine's attitude toward him will be tinged with awe."

"And after Livingstone and the theorems?"

"Oh, the deluge, I suppose," admitted the doctor uneasily. "I 've put off the day of reckoning as long as possible, — too long her aunts tell me, — but it can't be postponed more than a twelvemonth more. Then she must go back to her mother's people. I 've not sent her before because — well, I 've dreaded to part from her of course. Then her aunts would have sent her to boarding-school and college. I don't want her sent to college. She knows as much now as it 's wholesome to teach a woman. She lacks experience, but that will come soon enough when she reaches the outside world ; then it will be 'good-by' to Wilsonport. In the mean time I 'll make the most of her misgivings as

to the stability of two times two ; it gives me this year."

" And you will follow her ? " Mr. Proctor's question hurried. Wilsonport looked suddenly lacking in perspective.

The doctor did not answer at once, and his face showed gray. When he did reply his tone was guarded to the point of severity.

" I think not. I belong here. When I said ' my people ' it was not an idle phrase. I should n't bear uprooting."

Mr. Proctor's glance swept the picture before him : the village ; the mill ; the forest — his forest ; his mill. Did the village hold his people as well ? The question found no welcome, but it tarried.

It was the next afternoon that Mr. Proctor, sitting in his office, found his door blocked with shadow. He looked up to meet a woman's glance studying him.

" Do you wish to see me ? " he asked, curiosity overcoming his annoyance. " Won't you come in ? "

The young woman — she seemed very young despite her magnificent proportions — ignored the proffered chair. Her breath came brokenly, and her fingers twitched as she braided them together.

" You think Adrien Lauzeone is working for you ? " she demanded.

" Yes," Mr. Proctor said, mildly amused at the contrast between question and manner. " Adrien is packing shingles. You 'll find him at the back of the mill."

"You will not find him at the back of the mill." Her voice chanted triumph. "He has run from his work. Go quick, and you will catch him. He is at the lighthouse with" — her head flung back — "with Katherine Edmister. I catch them. Go quick!"

The toss of the girl's head stirred a memory, and Mr. Proctor's perplexity grew. "So, you are Adrien's sister." His tone was grave. "I heard that he had a sister — a sister that worked hard for him that he might go to school. And now this sister comes and asks me to catch her brother?"

The girl's fair skin grew red, but her mouth remained sullen.

"He works for you," she said doggedly, "and runs away. It is Katherine Edmister. She makes him do it. You go catch them. You will see."

The venom in her tone stirred the man to anger that he would not analyze. "The shingle packers are paid by the piece," he explained, turning away. "If Adrien does not want to work, it is not my business. You must excuse me now. I am busy."

The girl walked out of the mill yard with a step that admitted no consciousness of rebuff, and as Mr. Proctor watched her, admiration strove with his unreasoning vexation. If Detiere were a leopard, he thought, this woman was fitted for his mate. He returned to his desk, but he could not work. Briery and uncomfortable Katherine might be, but she was still his friend's daughter. His loyalty to her was in arms, and pushing away his work, he started for the lighthouse.

Heinrich's home tipped the northern horn of the bay, as the doctor's did the southern, and clung, limpet-wise, to a tumbled mass of pine-clad rock. The day was oppressive, close, and warm, with mutterings of thunder in the air, but at the lighthouse the shadow had ever the coolness of a grotto, and Mr. Proctor walked rapidly, spurred by the thought of the comfort awaiting him.

Some rods from the lighthouse he slackened his pace. The still air was pulsating to the throb of Heinrich's violin, and it behooved the listener to go softly, for Heinrich's violin, famed through the forest land, sang seldom but at twilight, and never save for those whom he held dear.

Mr. Proctor pushed the twigs from his pathway, and parted the bushes in silence, till an opening in the trees framed a picture that checked him suddenly. In front of the lighthouse a table-rock, polished by rain and wave to satin smoothness, hung like a broad shelf over the water. On one end of this platform lay a gayly patterned quilt, and on it, as on a dais, Heinrich and his daughter sat enthroned, while in front of them, with steps light as the quivering shadows from the trees above, Katherine Edmister and Adrien Lauzeone waltzed blithely to the lilt of the violin. Their slender figures, silhouetted against the gray of lake and sky, were lissome as the dancing shapes on Greek entablatures, and their heads, chaplet-crowned with leaves and golden-rod, suggested echoes of a day when Pan held revel.

An unwary step brought Mr. Proctor into view,

and the music stopped with a crash. There was a pause long enough for a quickly drawn breath to catch and die, and in that space the man saw determination born in Katherine's look and grow to action.

She swept him a courtesy that brought her wreath-twined curls to the level of his knee.

"Another suitor?" Her eyes pleaded with him to do his part. "This is the court of the Princess Bertha. Good sir, what is your name?"

There was no time to think, else he had turned temptation's face aside. "Only a wayfarer" — he made his way to where the lame girl, Bertha, sat upon her throne — "Petruchio by name." He turned to Katherine. "You will present me?"

The blaze he was expecting lit her eyes, but she said nothing, and answering the eagerness in Bertha's look, she named him gravely.

The humility of the man's bowed head was not of manner only. Should this young girl shame him in courtesy? He sought swiftly for words, that she alone should understand, to hold his penitence. Bertha was flushing into comeliness at his deference, and her pleasure held him for a moment longer. Then he turned to Katherine.

"Do I recognize Diana?" he asked. "The arrows seem familiar. But tell me, Goddess, why not use your weapons in your own behalf? You have them ever barbed in the defense of others."

For the first time he heard her laugh spontaneously. It was a sound that the others joined without asking why.

Adrien, meantime, was looking sullen, and pulled impatiently at the garlands on his head and shoulders. Katherine turned to him, and Mr. Proctor caught her whisper. "Don't, Adrien, it will hurt Bertha. Perhaps our Princess will make a wreath for her new courtier." She added the last sentence that they all might hear.

"But court is over," Heinrich interrupted. "Look!" He dropped his violin and pointed to a finger of shadow that lay across their feet.

The little group relaxed into easier attitudes. "We hold court an hour," Katherine explained. "Mr. Heinrich measures it by a new dial every day. This afternoon it was the fir tree."

"May I come earlier another time?" asked Mr. Proctor as he found a seat at Bertha's feet. Work might lie waiting for him at his office, but he had forgotten. The village seemed far away.

There was no constraint in the silence that followed. The pleasure in Heinrich's face was in itself a welcome that lacked no force through being voiceless, and content was in the air.

"What's the matter with the shingles this afternoon, Adrien?" Mr. Proctor went on, at length. He was playing with the leaves in Bertha's lap, and his query sounded idle.

Adrien, who was stretched on the rock at Katherine's side, turned a smiling face toward his questioner. "I am going away to-morrow — going to Madison." He whispered the words as if afraid that he might hear his voice and wake. "This was my last afternoon, so I was paid off, and came here. I am going away."

The repetition of the last words held emotion, and Mr. Proctor turned instinctively toward Katherine. He regretted the look, for he surprised a mist in the girl's upraised eyes.

She met his glance steadily. "Perhaps you can help us," she said. "You saw us dancing. Was it right? Adrien will want to dance at the university, and I was trying to show him how to hold his partner. I've been studying the pictures in the magazines to learn how. Did it look at all as it should?"

What had lowered her defenses? This new and submissive Katherine bred regret in Mr. Proctor's mind. "You danced well, both of you," he said, "but Adrien held you too closely. I wonder" — his tone, taught by his surprise, learned humility — "whether you would like me to show you the way that I was taught."

Adrien looked a negative, but Katherine was on her feet.

"Please do," she begged. "Now watch, Adrien."

Heinrich picked up his violin slowly, and the first notes wavered; then his mouth closed firmly, and his bow drew clearer tones. He must submit to seeing Katherine with strangers; the lesson was as well learned now as later.

Mr. Proctor's step caught the measure with joy. It was long since he had moved to the rhythm of pleasure, and after his first feeling of exhilaration had passed memories crowded. The rhythmic swing brought back times and faces that claimed

him and that he had endeavored to forget. For a moment a wave of remembrance obliterated his surroundings, and the cadence of the waltz stood to him for all that he had forsworn, — the amenities and luxuries that seemed once more vital; the voices of women and the companionship of men — the men and women who were of his past.

The music jarred.

"Is it that I go on?" Heinrich suggested.

Mr. Proctor shook his head and seated the girl on the quilted mosaic of the throne with a bow that was a survival of his reverie.

"I have nothing to teach you. You dance beyond comparison," he announced with deliberation that seemed the flower of compliment. "I would give something to dance with you on a good floor."

The girl blossomed under his approbation. He had never praised her before. "Heinrich's violin taught me." There was new shyness in her tone. "I never danced anywhere else."

Heinrich smiled at the violin he was caressing. "The gulls taught you," he murmured, "and the winds, and the clouds."

"She skates the same way," said Adrien impersonally. Then he turned away his face and drew a long breath that wavered. "I won't be here to skate with you this winter, Katherine. You 'll have to find some one else." His attempt at nonchalance failed pitiably.

Katherine's eyes again grew misty. "Look," she exclaimed, quickly defensive; "see the rainbow over the lake!"

The clouds, which throughout the afternoon had pushed rounded shoulders above the horizon line, were now massed in a bank in the southeast, but above them, spanning the arch from lake to forest, hung a rainbow, its color thrown into relief by the threatening shade below.

"See, Adrien," Katherine went on, her voice steadier, "the foot of the bow lies to the south, just where you are going. You 'll find your pot of gold."

"Is it gold?" asked Mr. Proctor. "I thought glory was what you were seeking." The sympathy in his voice made his words kindly.

"It 's the same thing, Katherine says," the boy answered. "It 's what we want most."

Katherine nodded, and her mouth wore a smile born of her own thoughts. "That 's what it means to me," she said. The peace of the afternoon seemed to bring fullness of speech. "I think that the gold at the foot of the rainbow must have different forms for all of us. It can't be a yellow metal for everybody. It 's the thing that looks fairest. Now Adrien's pot of gold is an education."

"And yours, Miss Katherine?" The question came from Mr. Proctor.

Katherine's mouth broke into its irregular teasing smile. "I don't know," she confessed. "It 's one thing, then another. Sometimes it 's to try my wings, to learn what 's waiting for me there" — her comprehensive gesture swept the horizon. "Sometime it 's power, only I don't know just what power

is. It 's never money, as yours is, for I 've seen too little to have it mean much to me."

"So my pot of gold is money, is it?" Mr. Proctor's voice held a hint of abstraction that made him suddenly remote. "Well, that 's a definite goal at least. Yours is n't."

"Yes, yours is definite, and you 'll reach it," said the girl with the conviction of a seer. "I know, for look at the rainbow. It stops just over your lumber piles."

Mr. Proctor laughed outright. Was this child or woman? At all events, she harbored generous impulses, despite her thorns. He was glad for Dr. Edmister's sake that he had seen his daughter's softer side.

CHAPTER VIII

A BRIDGE IS CROSSED

THE Buffalo steamer landed at the pier the next day, and the crowd of travelers peering over her rail saw a leave-taking that they called picturesque. Adrien was saying good-by to Wilsonport.

"I wish these people would n't stare at Ferdinante," Dr. Edmister grumbled to Proctor, who was looking over the freight. "How we drop our reservations when we turn sight-seers!"

Mr. Proctor turned. "Don't miss the best part of the play yourself," he said with lowered voice. "Have n't you seen Livingstone and his impressive friend? My vacation is over. Methinks I hear the tocsin."

"Livingstone? I had forgotten it was time for him." The doctor's tone was almost reprovingly matter of fact. "Those trunks suggest that his friend has come to stay."

The friend had indeed come to stay. He was Dr. Griggs, the lounging audience was at once informed, and he had chosen Wilsonport as a home, attracted thereto by the beauty of its surroundings and the intelligence of its people.

Mr. Proctor, included in this comprehensive introduction and biography, was conscious from the

eyes about him that he was present at an epoch-making moment. Here, at last, was a man who had come from the outside because he wished. The situation was new.

Equally new was Dr. Griggs himself; his speech and his raiment — both carefully ornate — reflected worlds not realized in the former standards of the village. His very walk, as he led a procession from the pier, lent to the sawdust-covered street an air that was dimly metropolitan.

Mr. Proctor, following with outward meekness in the rear of this attendant column, was momentarily impatient of Dr. Edmister's kindly generalities as to the benefits of having two physicians in the village. Dr. Griggs's apologetically pompous back seemed, in some way, even more irritating than his face. Were there no boundaries to Dr. Edmister's tolerance?

Mr. Proctor's question would have been justified to his own mind could he have heard a conversation of a week later. Livingstone and George Cole were in the mill yard, and their talk was of a shining sign, large of frame and gilt of letter, that announced to him who ran the residence of Arthur Griggs, M. D., Physician and Surgeon.

Mr. Cole's remarks discouraged argument. "Dr. Edmister 's good enough for me," he announced, with frowning brows.

Mr. Livingstone's eyes did not flinch. "Perhaps," he said, "but Dr. Edmister countenances spirituous liquors. Dr. Griggs is a consecrated man and a teetotaler. Remembering this, can a man like you stop to choose between them?"

Cole looked stolidly distressed. He had no arts at his command to hide his discomfiture, and Livingstone pressed his point.

"Think of your duty as an example to the men you are employing," he urged.

Cole's slower wits seized at the loophole with an eagerness that proved his mental disturbance. "I don't employ the men," he explained. "Mr. Proctor does that."

The schoolmaster ignored the evasion. "It should not be necessary for me to point out to you the straight road of salvation," he said severely. "If you fail in this matter it is because you have sold yourself to the Mammon of unrighteousness."

An illuminating beam of humor struggled through the clouds of Cole's mind. "You 've called Mr. Proctor Mammon before," he remarked, snapping his fingers, "but what has that to do with your Dr. Griggs?"

The other's lips tightened. "It has this to do with it: Mr. Proctor is an atheist, an oppressor of the poor. You know his past. If you accept his blood-stained money, the least you can do is to consecrate it to better uses. And Dr. Edmister is in league with him. He is a man without" —

"Look out!" Cole interrupted with emphasis that answered for an oath. "Let Dr. Edmister alone." He raised a hand that clenched unconsciously.

Livingstone caught the upraised hand and pointed with it to a man who was working near

them. "Look at Knud Halverson," he commanded. "He was the best trimmer you had in the mill; you said so yourself. Look at him now! One hand gone, and all he can do is to drive the dump-cart. And it was drink that did it. He never would have lost his hand if he 'd been sober, and yet you try to tell me that Dr. Edmister is a good friend to the men."

"But Dr. Edmister tries to keep the men from drinking."

"Yes, and prescribes whiskey!" Livingstone kicked the sawdust. "I tell you the only friend the men have is the one who practices what he pretends to preach. Does Dr. Edmister sign the pledge? No, he is too superior to need restraints of that kind. He and Mr. Proctor are run in the same mould. They are in league, I tell you, to debauch and destroy the working-man. Are you with them or not?"

Cole walked to a pile of lumber and looked it over with deliberation. When he returned his eyes were steady. "You 've said enough, Livingstone. And Mr. Proctor is my boss. You can remember that."

"I can remember that you are pledged to a master called Christ," returned the other gravely. "You, too, will remember it some day."

"I have never forgotten it," said Cole; but though his voice was firm, his mind was troubled. It was true that Dr. Edmister would not sign the pledge. And Livingstone was right, too, about the whiskey. The tyrannous saws exacted clear

eyes and steady brains. Yet did this bear on Dr. Griggs? It was an unquiet heart that the superintendent carried back with him to his cottage that evening.

He found Katherine Edmister in the kitchen with Olive, and the sound of her laughter lightened his frowning eyes.

"Father has gone to Birch Creek," she announced, "and I'm to stay here till he calls for me. Will he ever let me grow up, do you think?"

Mr. Cole looked at her with puzzled intentness. "You look more grown up now, someway. I noticed it when I met you in the store the other day. What is the matter? Don't you" — he paused, and his tone grew sincerely apprehensive — "don't you feel well?"

Katherine flushed. Outspoken affection had not been common enough in her life to enable her to meet it without embarrassment, and the moisture that blurred her eyes taught her that she had been fighting loneliness.

"It's my hair, I think," she said, trying to frown down Olive's laughter. "I've been putting it up lately, and of course it makes me look older. There!" She drew out a handful of hairpins and shook the short curls over her shoulders. "Is that better?"

Mr. Cole's hand checked his wife's protest. "Yes," he replied, with disproportionate gravity, "that is better." He could not have explained his own feeling, but the thought of Katherine as a woman seemed, in some formless way, to add to

the perplexities of the afternoon. His sense of the comfortable stability of his surroundings was gone; his moorings of the accustomed had been shaken.

"We 'll have to hurry and do the dishes," said Mrs. Cole as they finished supper. "It 's choir practice to-night."

Katherine had been looking absent. "I 'll wash the dishes, Olive," she said. "I 'd better not go to the church with you, for father may come for me early."

"But you 'll be lonesome." Mrs. Cole's protest was faint. An evening's respite from the treadmill of dishwashing was not to be put by lightly.

A laugh of affectionate comprehension chased the listlessness from Katherine's face. "I 'm never lonesome," she protested, as she cleared the table, "and then I 've Chevalier. Please go."

"Are you going to stop for Karen?" she asked, as Mrs. Cole put on her hat. "If you are, I 'll walk as far as that with you. I have n't seen her this week."

Mrs. Cole dropped her shawl and looked astonished. "Why, Karen just went by with Mr. Proctor. Oh, we never stop for Karen now."

"Now?" Katherine echoed. The stab of surprise which confused her made her use the question mark, which she instantly regretted.

"Since Karen and Mr. Proctor have been keeping company," Olive explained with relish. "You don't mean to say that Karen has n't told you. He walks to church with her all the time."

"I have n't seen Karen much lately," Katherine

quickly defended, "and she would n't tell me, anyway. Why, I — I would n't *want* her to tell me."

"She tells other people fast enough," said Mrs. Cole triumphantly. She was fond of Katherine, but this was a situation that she could not resist. "I should think that you 'd feel kind of queer about it."

"Karen has been very busy," Katherine persisted. "I live up on the hill, you know," she went on, with a somewhat wavering smile, "so that I never hear any news. Let me fix your shawl. I don't suppose Karen thinks that she has anything to tell."

Katherine washed the dishes and swept the kitchen in a stormy frame of mind. The storm was at herself, for she was unused to pain and resented it. Karen had failed her and the world was awry, but the sharpest sting lay in her sudden bewildered admission of her own unhappiness — and that at so trivial a hurt. She raged at her weakness; she would show more self-control. What was it to her that Karen had found another friend? It was what she had expected, but she had put it off into the future, as something that might occur when she was so old that she would not care, for she had an ill-defined belief that womanhood and its resulting complement of marriage brought with it a blessed callousness of heart and mind. Had her belief been put in words she would have scorned it, but it was none the less an undercurrent of her thought. Age brought wisdom; it must also bring indifference — else how could people live!

The September evening was chilly, and the work done, Katherine still sat in the kitchen, her feet on the fender of the cooking-stove. "I 'm never lonesome," she had said to Olive — but why had not Karen been to see her? Chevalier climbed into her lap and laid his head against her arm with a questioning sigh. He ignored the tear he would have liked to lick away and sighed again, while Katherine patted him mechanically. He had served as comforter before; he had no instinct now to tell him that his power was waning.

The sound of steps approaching the kitchen brought Katherine to realities, and she opened the door without waiting for a knock. It was not her father she knew, for his conscientious use of the formal front entrance was his one violation of village traditions, but it must be some of the neighbors, and the doorstep, an uncertainly balanced shingle bolt, had often bred dark misgiving in her mind.

The light from the open door showed the dark face and unkempt curls of Louis Detiere. The red silk handkerchief around his neck was not more brilliant than the scarlet of his lips.

"I want Cole," he said sharply. His disturbed glance went over Katherine's head and searched the kitchen.

"Mr. Cole is not here," replied Katherine with equal sharpness. She knew the man by sight, and his reputation was a matter for the disciplining of children. "Be good or Louis Detiere will catch you" was a compelling phrase.

The man closed his teeth. "He has gone to Livingstone's meeting. I will drag him away."

"He has gone to choir meeting."

"Choir meeting? So? He tell you that? Choir meeting!"

The insult of the man's laugh darkened the gray of Katherine's eyes. "Mr. Cole is at the church, Mr. Detiere. If you want him you can find him there. I must close the door."

The man looked down with sudden recognition of her presence. "He lied," he said roughly. "The church where he go is with Livingstone, in Torstenson's feed loft."

"The church where he went is on the next corner. Take your foot away, please. It is cold, and I am going to close the door."

The easy superiority of the girl's tone waked a chord of association and brought the man's eyes back to her face. "So? You are Dr. Edmister's girl," he said, with a chuckle of comprehension, and a vagrant impulse moved his hand to his cap.

"I am Miss Edmister," returned Katherine with patient tolerance.

He drew his foot away. "You look like you tell the truth." There was wonder in the admission. "Where is Livingstone?"

The girl ignored the first part of his remark, and a little sigh escaped her. Her thoughts were still with Karen, and her speech with Detiere was taking but a fraction of her mind. "I don't know where you 'll find Mr. Livingstone," she said. "Not at

the church, for he does n't sing. Will you leave a message?"

The patronage of her manner brought a gleam to the man's eyes. He was accustomed to dominate women and was tired of it. There were women living who could have told Katherine, had they seen his face, that she had won the perilous distinction of Louis Detiere's admiration.

"Yes," he said, "I have a message. Tell Cole that Livingstone's little bonfire did n't burn. I made it — so!" His foot brushed the step in vigorous pantomime. "Tell him that, and if he knows what I mean" — He stopped, and his laugh was suggestive. "Well!"

Katherine's mind was with him now and was alert. "What do you mean? I can take no message like that. What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. I found the fire, and I did — so!"

"But what fire? This is child's play."

"So? Child's play?" He was master again, and his tone swaggered. "But children should not have matches. See? When I see Livingstone" — The break, which stood with him for matter which transcended speech, again supplied his meaning.

"Stop!" The girl barred his exit with unconsciousness of gesture. "Stop! You say that Mr. Livingstone lighted a fire and that you put it out. Where was the fire?"

"Under a lumber pile," the man answered, to his own surprise. The girl's eyes were looking

directly into his, and he went on. "I was going through the yards, and I found it. There was shavings there, and they smelled of oil."

"Oh!" There was a shiver in the monosyllable. "How dare you accuse Mr. Livingstone? Why do you do it?"

The Belgian was said not to like questions, but he answered this one. "Livingstone hates Proctor." The girl's eyes had not left his face, yet he knew that she did not see him. How could he make her conscious that he, Louis Detiere, was there? "I will find Livingstone," he blustered. "Then" —

He had succeeded. Katherine's eyes had caught the gleam of the knife in his belt, and the look that met his now held, not only knowledge of his presence, but memory of his repute.

"Don't look for Mr. Livingstone to-night," she begged. "Let it go till to-morrow. Think it over. You will see that you are wrong. Even if, as you say, he dislikes Mr. Proctor, he would n't destroy property. It is preposterous."

"Who did it?" asked the man.

"I don't know," she said with less assurance, "but it was n't Mr. Livingstone. Why" — her thoughts took a new leap — "did you want Mr. Cole?"

The Belgian shrugged his shoulders. "He is the mill boss. Then there is meetings to-night at Torstenson's. I wanted to find if he is there."

He turned away, and again the lamp's rays pointed to his knife. Was it impulse that cap-

tured Katherine? Her own voice was a stranger when she spoke again.

"Listen! You 've done your duty. Let it rest there. I will tell Mr. Cole. Please go home and leave the matter to me."

Detiere looked at her, and his reply was pertinent. "Why?"

"Because — because you will make trouble if you see Mr. Livingstone to-night. You are angry and will make a scene. Then all the village will know. No matter if you are wrong, it will hurt the school. No, I know that you don't care for the school, but you do care for — for order. You are the head of the shingle mill. You can understand how important it is that Mr. Livingstone should have obedience. Please go."

The Belgian frowned. The girl was dictating to him. He stared at her rudely, till, of a sudden, his mood was shaken by unextinguishable laughter. How small she looked! He measured his own inches, and his amusement grew. Go? Of course he would go. He had never been thwarted by a woman, and he enjoyed seeing himself obey — surprises were precious to Louis Detiere.

"I go," he repeated, as he clicked the gate. "You tell Cole that I go. That I left my business for a girl to do." His trumpet call of laughter at the thought rolled echoingly down the deserted street.

CHAPTER IX

WHILE THE PENDULUM WAS SWINGING

The mind that Katherine carried back with her into the kitchen was not the unobtrusive handmaid that was wont to do her bidding. It led her into alien paths. She had been too much absorbed in winning her point with Detiere to think of all that it involved; now its import left her breathless.

Some one had tried to burn the mill — the mill that fed the men! Her anger struggled with her fear. How Mr. Proctor must be hated, how unjustly! A sudden allegiance to him sprang to life. He was no taskmaster. She saw his face again, as she had seen it a week before upon the lighthouse rock, and its memory rebuked her. Clean-drawn and spirited it was, but not unkind. He was her father's friend. She had never thought of him in that regard before.

She walked the floor. How could she warn him? She must see him — see him at once. It was not enough that Mr. Cole would tell him in the morning. So wanton an attempt upon his property should not be hidden even for the night. The room choked her as she thought, and she opened the door. The night was dark, and the broad squares of light that marked the church

seemed beckoningly near. Mr. Cole was there, Olive, Mr. Proctor perhaps. She could walk there in a moment and see them all. She longed for their companionship. If she could share the burden of her news, the night would seem less black.

She stepped outside. Her father would not come for her that night. When he was detained as late as this, he left her till the morning. The church was but a few rods away. Why hesitate? She would sleep better if she felt that Mr. Proctor knew.

The door of the church was open, and she halted on the steps. The group within was larger than she had expected. She had no mind to show her evident excitement to so many, so would wait for the meeting to disband. She watched them idly. They were not practicing, for the moment, and Mr. Cole and Olive, their faces severe with importance, were selecting hymns. Mr. Proctor, with Karen, stood near the door; his attitude showed that he had just come in, and the girl, with shining eyes, seemed begging him to stay.

The girl watching outside felt her chin lift defensively. Karen looked eager, and Katherine's heart went out in protest. Karen must not try so palpably to entertain this man — must not show him that his admiration was a thing to covet; for it was all a matter of indifference to him. The girl without knew, instantly and surely, that his thoughts were elsewhere. It was Karen's flushed beauty that appealed to him, and Katherine felt,

with swift resentment, that the girl's words but barely reached his ear.

Her jealousy for Karen showed a new phase now — a conquering one. Friendship was in arms. She, too, loved Karen's beauty, but she loved the girl as well — the girl whom this man's supercilious blindness would never let him see. The old irritation that his presence bred increased fourfold. How calm he looked, untouched by all the drama of the enwrapping night! What that he knew nothing of it? He should know. Such ignorance as his came only from a callous unconcern of all but his own pleasure. His lack of knowledge was the secret of the crime.

And when he did know — what then? He had turned from Karen now, and his glance, idly wandering, seemed to meet her own. It challenged all her pulses. It was a firm glance, she acknowledged, but hard — the glance of a man who would exact his pound for pound.

She turned away to the village. Its homes were sleeping. How pitifully small and poor they looked in the dim light! And the tired hearts within them! Unreasoning, childish, wicked, perhaps, but always tired. A clutch of mother pity seized the girl, who herself could not remember the pressure of a mother's arms. Her village — the people who loved her! How could she betray them to this man?

A step behind her made her conscious of the tears upon her cheeks, and she turned.

"Mr. Livingstone!" she cried. "Mr. Livingstone!"

She was heedless of her tears now, as she ran down the steps with eager greeting. Here was the one man who could help her, and she could talk to him freely. Bigoted or not, he loved the village; he would understand.

He listened to her story in absolute silence. If the emotion that she had expected was not in his face, she was then too self-absorbed to miss it. At mention of Detiere his face grew dark.

"Why did you interfere?" he interrupted.

She stopped, her narrative checked rudely. For a moment she, too, wondered why. Her reasons, cogent before, seemed slipping from her grasp. "Why — why, to prevent a scene." Then, as Livingstone's expression grew more inquiring, "The man will see, when he comes to himself tomorrow, that he was wrong, that you know nothing about it."

"No, I know nothing," he echoed. He still looked uncomprehending. "Nothing at all."

Katherine looked at him. His denial grated, and she had the sudden forlorn consciousness that she stood alone. Of course he knew nothing. Why should he think it necessary to tell her so?

"But I promised to tell Mr. Cole," she said, following her own thought, "and now I don't know what to do. Mr. Cole will have to tell Mr. Proctor — that will be his duty — and then" — She made a hopeless gesture.

"What can Mr. Proctor do?" asked the man. "He does n't know who did it." There was a hint

of complacence in his voice, and Katherine's answer came with frowning haste.

"He will find out who did it. He will find out or lose his mill in trying. Can't you see how strong he is and how determined? He is merciless too. He is n't a bad man, but the life here is a jest to him. The men are puppets in his eyes, because he knows nothing about them; he does n't want to know. Oh, if he should discover this — can't you see what a crime it is! — he would never be able to make excuses. If I should tell father, he would be afraid of partisanship and would say, 'Tell Mr. Proctor,' but — Oh, is n't there some other way?"

Mr. Livingstone's attention had wandered. He had drawn nearer the steps and was looking in at the church door. "Proctor 's in there," he announced.

"I know. That 's why I 'm here. I intended to tell Mr. Proctor when he came out, but" — A new idea claimed her, and her face lighted with relief. "Why, Mr. Livingstone, Mr. Detiere said that you held meetings with the men. If you do that, you can protect the people from themselves; you can make them see how wicked this is — how wicked and useless. They don't think. How can they? But you can teach them better. If you will do that, I won't need to tell Mr. Cole. Will you?"

Mr. Livingstone's thoughts were still with the group within, and his moody eyes said that he did not find them pleasing. "The prosperity of the

wicked is an offense," he said absently. "Christ overthrew the tables of the money changers."

"Why, Mr. Livingstone, you surely can't mean — What would become of the village if the mill should burn?"

The perplexed horror of the girl's tone waked the man. "I don't mean that I approve," he said with some eagerness. "I think that such an attempt is ill-advised — ill-advised. I shall tell the men so. You won't tell Mr. Cole?"

The girl's perplexity took on recoil. That request should not have come from him. The group within the church was moving, and she watched it breathlessly. It was now or not at all.

"What can I do?" she asked aloud. "What is right? Yes, Mr. Livingstone, I must tell Mr. Cole. That is the only way." She stopped. Mr. Proctor was coming down the aisle, and his glance, searching the night, seemed once more to fall upon her own. Amusement lurked in his mouth and altered the lines of his eyes — amusement he had turned his back upon the others to conceal.

The pendulum swung back. "No, I am wrong." Her tone was unwavering now. "It will be wiser to leave this all with you. You can help the men and watch them. Then I won't need to tell Mr. Cole, will I? You will promise?"

The young man's solemn eyes turned full upon her. "You do not need to say that," he rebuked. "My life is one long promise to help the men to do the thing the Lord deems best."

"The thing the Lord deems best." Katherine

echoed the words as she ran down the street. Was that what she had done; or had she meddled?

She reached the house and stood upon the door-step waiting. The darkness was a welcome shelter for her sudden fear and shame. To what was she committed? The step from girlhood out — she recalled, mechanically, the ancient phrase — was already of the past. The last few hours had put her far beyond the line. Her first deceit — and why? Oh, but the people! They loved her father; they were worth it all.

CHAPTER X

MISTRESS QUIXOTE

"A UNION temperance meeting will be held in the schoolhouse Saturday, September 9th, at eight o'clock. Dr. Griggs and other prominent speakers will address the meeting. All are cordially invited. Come and bring your friends."

This notice, printed on brown wrapping paper, was seen the next morning nailed to the hacked tree trunk that served as a hitching post in front of Torstenson's store, and it did its work so well that the succeeding evening found the schoolhouse crowded.

It was not that the subject of temperance was alluring, — that was, indeed, an aged and distasteful tale, — but what it lacked in novelty the name of Dr. Griggs supplied. He was said, by those attending the mid-week meetings, to have a gift for prayer. Such a reputation did not seem compatible with his worldly garb, and controversy flourished. Temperance too? The term gathered social importance from association with his name.

The meeting justified anticipation. "Dr. Griggs is a grand speaker," the women said, as they went home that evening, and their husbands, stumbling in front, mumbled an affirmative. They

were curiously stirred. They had heard little of temperance, but much of conflict, of aggression, and the fife that led the singing had called them to their feet, not once, but many times. The familiar strains of "Hold the Fort" became a war cry; they sang it till their bodies swung to and fro to the rhythm of its marching time. They had not been asked to sign the pledge; they had been summoned to battle, and they thrilled with the conviction that they must unite and overthrow — something. Dr. Griggs had spoken of oppression. They grasped the word. They heard too of fighting and of faith, and the alliteration stirred them. Liquor was not their only foe. Before they went home they rose in a body and voted to continue the meetings.

It was several evenings later when Mr. Proctor came in. Karen and George Cole had spoken to him urgently about attending the meetings, and he had laid aside his books and pipe to pleasure them. He was late, and the audience had just risen.

"'Am I a soldier of the cross?'"

they asked with fervor.

The fife was leading as usual, its piercing note dominant and compelling, but as Mr. Proctor entered the fifer faltered and lost his place. It was only for a moment, but the scarcely appreciable break had done its work, and the audience, swayed by an emotion that the fifer had set free, stopped singing and turned toward the newcomer with frowns. A hiss came from the rear of the

room, and though it was smothered by a friendly hand, mouths shaped to answer it with others.

One could have counted heart beats. The sullen eyes that met Mr. Proctor's were hostile, and as he faced them his own grew scornfully defiant. The notes of the fife dropped with a wail, and a little child, holding fast to its mother's gown, began to cry. Hands were clenching, — in all that room one man stood at bay, — when a voice, uncertain and faltering, began to sing, —

"'Rock of ages, cleft for me.'"

In the hushed room the faint notes echoed like smothered memories. Katherine Edmister was singing, and her girlish face took for the moment the contour of her father's graver one. The people breathed hard.

"'Let me hide myself in Thee.'"

They had sung that over many a coffin, and Dr. Edmister, haggard from watching, had stood beside them. Were they forgetting him now? If so, the face that memory summoned held no rebuke. And this was his daughter. Their voices rushed to her rescue.

"'Save me, Lord! and make me pure,'"

sang voices that were husky. A woman standing next to Mr. Proctor opened her hymn book and offered it to him with a deprecatory smile. He hesitated a moment, then his look, too, softened, and taking the book he began to sing. Wilsonport had never heard him sing, and the deep notes that made their way through the sound already

rising added new tension to the air. He was singing as he had never sung in the days when he roared out the refrain to a college chorus, for the melody was a vent to a perturbed heart. The hurt of the moment before had been a real one, and he was combatant and sore. The isolation that he had felt at his superintendent's wedding had not lost force in the succeeding six months, and to-night it did not seem a thing for shrugs and laughter. Why submit to it longer? And yet —

"'Simply to Thy cross I cling'"

sang the voices. There was no hostility in them now, and with the healing of each word the resentment in Mr. Proctor's mind died. He looked around, and timid glances of friendliness met him. There was nothing in his answering look to send their eyes away.

George Cole rose at the conclusion of the singing. His eyes were lustrous, and his mouth wore decision that it had lacked for a time.

"I will ask Mr. Ellis to lead us in prayer," he said.

Mr. Ellis bowed his head with a prayer for help that the congregation did not hear. Could he but say the right thing! The voice that asked for guidance came from a full heart.

"Father in Heaven," he begged, "be patient with our blindness and lead us into the safe pastures of Thy peace." "Peace." The word was grateful, and the room calmed with that stillness that comes from unity of thought. He prayed for

charity, for help to endure the rigors of the day, and his listeners murmured "Amen." The care-lined faces lifted at the close of the prayer were softened and subdued.

Dr. Griggs rose and smiled glitteringly. "We will disband early this evening," he said, "but I will ask the officers of the Knights of Temperance to remain for consultation. There will be no more meetings until further notice."

The people scattered slowly. They stood uneasily, watching Mr. Proctor and making shamefaced excuses to speak to him. The atmosphere was distinctly friendly, but the fact remained that Mr. Proctor's coming had broken up the meeting, and he was keenly alive to the significance of this change of front. He owed the rise in the temperature to Katherine Edmister, as he well knew, and he made his way at once to where she was sitting with Mrs. Green.

"Well," he began, then stopped and held out his hand without speaking. This fiery little Katherine, whom he had ignored, seemed suddenly very near to him, very much his friend. To him she had grown to womanhood in this last hour, and an homage that was not wholly gratitude crept into his eyes.

Katherine looked embarrassed, but at the same time oddly reproachful. "It was nothing," she said nervously. "Come, Mrs. Green, we must go. It was nothing."

He placed himself before her. "It was everything," he insisted. "Won't you permit me to

thank you? I know what you would say, — that you did it in the interests of justice, that I was the under dog, — but that does n't change my gratitude. I 've always been the under dog with you, if you but knew it," he added, with a touch of half-mechanical gallantry.

To his surprise the girl flushed painfully. "No, no!" she cried with protest out of all proportion to his idle speech. "You have always had the upper hand. If you had been the 'under dog,' as you call it, we should have been spared more trouble than you know."

So the swift defense that had warmed his heart she called "trouble." He turned away, rebuffed and annoyed. This Mistress Quixote ran atilt at any windmill that offered, careless of the cause intrenched behind. He had been a fool to think otherwise.

Karen was smiling with invitation, but his mood did not incline him to meet her eyes. He went instead to Yngve.

"Yngve," he began without greeting, "why did you hiss me to-night?"

Yngve lifted a face where defiance met fear. "How do you know that I did it?" he evaded.

Mr. Proctor studied him. "I was n't sure when I asked," he said with distaste. "I am now. I 've stood a good deal of nonsense from you because it did n't seem worth my time to interfere. I think I 'll speak to your father. It is time he took you in hand."

The boy blanched with anger. "I 'm my own

boss," he blustered. "It is n't my father's business if I won't submit to oppression."

"Oppression!" meditated Mr. Proctor. "So, that 's it. And this is called a temperance meeting." He smiled rather bitterly. "All right, Yngve, overthrow oppression by all means. It 's a wicked thing," he added carelessly, as he turned away.

Yngve followed. "What is it that you think I 've done?" he asked in a half whisper.

The suspense of the boy's tone brought a return of Mr. Proctor's interest. "More than I 've time or inclination to tell," he said oracularly. Since melodrama was on the boards, he, too, would play his share.

Yngve looked at him for a moment with shrewdness that strove hard to match his own, then slouched away. He had been outgeneraled in wit, but that was not important. He salved his pride with a fierce mutter to the effect that talk was cheap.

Mr. Proctor felt equal discomfort. His encounter with Yngve had been distasteful. He had no mind to play the bully, and the boy, whatever he had done, was Karen Torstenson's brother. He turned to find Karen, but she was absorbed with Mr. Livingstone, and he went away, well pleased to be left to his own thoughts.

At the door he met Ferdinante Lauzeone. He had not seen her since the day that she had come to his office, but hers was not a face to forget.

"Mr. Detiere and me was sorry," she said, with

a shy smile. It was the first open allusion that had been made to the scene of the evening, and Mr. Proctor enjoyed it. The woman impressed him, as she had before, with her splendid panther grace, and he felt as he might if some wild creature had shown him trust and liking. It was difficult to remember that she stood, night after night, at the bar of "The Farmer's Friend."

"Thank you." He smiled in turn. "So Detiere is here?"

The Belgian's dark face answered for him. "The doctor has a great girl," he said excitedly. "She is brave, very. She mak' the folks feel cheap."

It was the admiration that one commanding soul gives to another, but Mr. Proctor resented it. He turned to the woman beside him.

"You remember the day that you came to my office, you asked me why Adrien was not working?" he questioned hurriedly. "Did n't you know that he was going away the next day?"

"Yes," said the woman. She started down the steps, and the kindness left her face. "I knew that he go away," — her voice came back from the darkness, — "but if he have so much money that he did not need to work, why did he not stay at home? His family is not good enough for him. We don't talk right any more. He can't stand us since he knew Katherine Edmister."

CHAPTER XI

THE INITIAL MOVE

It was a week later when Heinrich knocked, one evening, at Mr. Proctor's door. Few visitors came to this house, and those few arrived by way of the kitchen and were ushered by Jessie into the apartment of state. It proved Heinrich's excitement that he came boldly up the front walk.

Mr. Proctor greeted him with misgiving. "Is Bertha well?" he asked, as he led the way into his study. The lighthouse had seen him often since the day that he had sat with Bertha on the rock, and the little lame girl's horizon had grown pink with clouds of pleasure.

"Yes, she is well." Heinrich's words might be laconic, but the wrinkles at his eyes showed upward curves. There were several roads to this man's heart, but none so wide and free of access as the one to which Bertha held the keys.

"I am very glad," Mr. Proctor said with slow heartiness. "Now I am not so much afraid of your bad news. You have bad news, Heinrich, I know from your face. What is it?"

Heinrich drew a soiled paper from his pocket and fumbled it in his knotted hands, then closed his lips, and handed it to Mr. Proctor.

"It is silly. I think that boys made it," he said.

The paper was crumpled and finger marked, but the printing on it was carefully done, and Mr. Proctor read it easily in the waning light.

"Boss," it read, "Notice. you have Caried this Opreshion far as you can be Careful the Laboring man is standing for His Rights and we heer notify you to take a Warning.

K of T L U"

Mr. Proctor read it twice in silence, while Heinrich looked out of the window. Then he folded the paper and put it into his pocket.

"Well," he said, "my unknown friend has a long name. Where did you find this, Heinrich?"

Heinrich turned a relieved face. Words, in this foreign tongue, meant little more than confusion of spirit, but he had a lexicon of tones, and Mr. Proctor's light speech was balm to his fear.

"On the path," he explained, "below the big dead tamarack."

"On the path, but nailed to a tree," Mr. Proctor supplemented. "I see where you tore it off. Have you shown it to any one?"

"To Bertha. I read not the English."

Mr. Proctor pondered. "You remember that I saw you at the feed loft, Heinrich," he said at length. He took the paper from his pocket and looked interrogation.

Heinrich's answering look was dumbly unhappy. "I cannot tell." His voice was almost sullen. "I go there no more, but I — I promised" —

"I understand. You promised to forget. Do you think it wise to forget this now?"

Heinrich shook his head. "It is perhaps boys?" he asked.

It was Mr. Proctor's turn to shake his head. "I don't think so," he said, as he lighted the lamp. "Most of the boys have been to school and can spell better. Well, whoever wrote it was frightened, or he would n't have put it way off there on the tamarack tree. I 'll find one on my office door when they grow bolder. I think that, after all, this is another case for poor memories. Suppose that we both forget?"

Heinrich looked dubious, though deferential. He touched his grizzled hair as he had done in his sailor days.

"You think not to tell the doctor?" he suggested.

"Yes, I might tell Dr. Edmister," Mr. Proctor agreed thoughtfully, "though I 've an impression that he tries to keep himself out of the village troubles. I think I 'll go up there this evening."

"This evening?" Heinrich's tone forgot its deference and was again eager. "Then will you ask him to get a sign?"

"A sign?"

"Like Dr. Griggs. I asked him, and he laughed."

"But why a sign for him? Every one knows him for fifty miles around. You don't want him to copy Dr. Griggs?"

The negative in Heinrich's face was angry, but

he persisted. "Folks like a sign. That's why they go to Dr. Griggs. You tell Dr. Edmister a sign is good."

The emotion in the man's words touched something in Mr. Proctor's heart that Wilsonport was wont to leave dormant.

"Friends are good, at all events," he said. "Dr. Edmister and I are to be congratulated. Thank you, Heinrich."

Heinrich had not more than reached the gate when Mr. Proctor started for the house on the bluff. He had not seen Dr. Edmister in some time, and there was much to say. Yet, after all, it was the doctor's daughter who was with him as he climbed the hill. Her he had not seen since the evening of the temperance lecture. He had been remiss in that. Whatever her motive, she had come to his defense. He must not permit his annoyance at her inconsistencies to blind him to that fact.

It was the daughter who met him. She was alone in the big living-room, curled cat-wise in an armchair near the red lamp, and she looked at him over a barricade of books and magazines.

"Father is with Mr. Green in the chicken house, trying to catch the old red hen," she said. "He 'll be in in a minute."

"What's the red hen done?" Mr. Proctor asked, as he drew a chair near her. "Is it the minister to dinner?"

Katherine's nose tilted with laughter. "It 's worse. Mrs. Green is going to have the sewing

circle to tea. It 's a yearly ceremony, and father and I are hunting for a hollow tree. We 're dreadfully in the way."

"Come and have dinner — supper — with me." Mr. Proctor beamed jubilantly at his inspiration. "Jessie will find a rival hen. You don't know what a kindness it would be if you would come."

Katherine looked over the corner of the lamp shade. There was certainly anticipation in his tone. His mouth, too, reassured her; never had she seen it more gravely horizontal. Excitement crept into her eyes. An invitation to supper which her father might accept would justify a long mark upon the calendar.

"But father" — she hesitated. "He 's never willing."

"We 'll overpower him. We 're two to one in this." He smiled that they two should be linked in a common cause. "We 'll make it an occasion of state. Shall we ask any one else?"

"Karen?" she debated. "I 'm sure Jessie will find a large hen."

"Miss Karen by all means. Any one else?"

"Not if you want father to accept. I wish he 'd come in now."

He came at once. The screams of disapproval from the chicken house had been quieting for some minutes, but they found an echo in the expression of his face.

"What about the red hen?" Mr. Proctor asked in greeting. "Miss Katherine and I have been laying plans."

"The red hen!" the doctor repeated irascibly. "Oh, she 's all right. Her plumage is a little ruffled, that 's all. It would be foolish to kill a good hen like that just at this season. Ephraim tells me that we 're getting very few eggs as it is. I wish you would tell Mrs. Green, Katherine, that when she wishes fowls for the table she can buy them. Now will you remember?"

"I will remember," Katherine meekly replied. That she did not remind her father that this was a charge of weekly occurrence showed that she was growing older.

The doctor recognized her clemency and grew apologetic. "I get attached to my poultry, and — consistency is a nuisance anyway. What is your plan, Proctor?"

"It 's been a rule of mine to dine at home," he said, as Mr. Proctor explained, "and — but you 'd like to go, would you, Katherine? Well, it 's a foolish rule. Day after to-morrow, is it? Yes, we 'll come with pleasure, Mr. Proctor."

Katherine looked demurely elated. "Father called it dinner instead of supper," she said. "I 'm going out to dinner at last. I feel as if I were living in a book. It 's going to be a festivity — my first dinner party. Think of your responsibility to make it all that I have dreamed!"

Mr. Proctor smiled at her, — the promised evening was assuming festivity in his own mind, — but her father looked up sharply as he drew out the chessboard.

"It occurs to me that I had better accept more

invitations or go where more will be tendered me," he said, as he polished the ivory of his black queen. "Your remarks, Katherine, are not wholly usual. Are you ready for a game, Proctor?"

"In a moment." The young man went back to his business with distaste. "I've something to show you first."

He told briefly of Heinrich's visit, conscious of Katherine's attentive ear. This was not a matter for listeners, and the girl had already shown too much inclination to be a partisan in these affairs. The word "trouble" returned to rankle in his mind.

Dr. Edmister examined the paper with care. "It's a 'Molly Maguire' — which shows that some one has been reading the papers. I'm glad that this came through Heinrich, for I've been perplexed about him — not doubtful, though. I don't believe that this amounts to much, Proctor. It reads like the bravado of a boy. Yngve Torstenson, for instance, might do a thing like this and repent in the sackcloth of fear the moment after. Socialists are made easily at nineteen — and as easily mended. What do you make of the signature?"

Mr. Proctor shook his head. "We've changed rôles," he said. "I've been the optimist before. I'm not now. This looks to me like the initial move in what you are pleased to call my game of chess. The signature I've not made out. L. U. is 'labor union' of course, and K. is probably 'Knights,' but I can't find a word to fit the T. I

canvassed the dictionary on my way up here to-night. I 'm inclined to think it a mistake in the printing. It looks a little like an I. Knights of Industry might do."

The men had drawn toward the table, away from Katherine, and she had taken a seat in a shadowed corner, as if wearied with their talk. The voice that came from her now, however, was far from weary.

"Temperance!" she exclaimed. "Knights of Temperance Labor Union!"

The men turned toward her and tried the words in their own minds.

"Yes, I believe that is it, Proctor," said the doctor, nodding. "Katherine has it."

"Of course she has it." Mr. Proctor felt a throb of pleasure that somehow made his speech short. "The second time to my rescue, Miss Katherine. I have occasion to thank you." He started toward her corner as he spoke.

"Wait!" cried the girl. She rose, and her right hand grasped the back of her chair. "Listen to me! This is n't the beginning, Mr. Proctor. They tried to burn your lumber piles. And I knew it. Mr. Detiere tried to tell Mr. Cole, but I would n't let him. I knew it, and I did n't tell you. But Mr. Livingstone promised to help, and" —

"Stop, Katherine!" Dr. Edmister rose heavily, and his face was white. "I cannot understand. One sentence at a time, and think carefully of what you say. Now."

The pallor of the doctor's face was mirrored in

his daughter's, but she met his eye. "I told you." She spoke to her father, as if Mr. Proctor were not there. "Some one tried to burn Mr. Proctor's lumber. Mr. Detiere found the fire and put it out. Then he came to tell Mr. Cole. He found me there alone. I persuaded him to drop the matter — to leave it with me. I promised to tell Mr. Cole myself."

In crucial moments all speech is elemental. Dr. Edmister's comment was what Detiere's had been, "Why?"

For a moment the girl glanced at Mr. Proctor. It was a look that both men misread, and they judged her harshly.

"Mr. Detiere was in search of Mr. Livingstone," she answered. "He thought that Mr. Livingstone had started the fire. He was angry; I was afraid he might do harm. Then I saw Mr. Livingstone and told him about it. He promised to help the men — to teach them to do better. I said that if he would do that I would not tell Mr. Cole."

The cold anger of the doctor's face was giving way to pain, so keen that Mr. Proctor interfered.

"Will you tell me" — his voice was stern even to his own ears — "why you changed your mind — why you tell us now?"

"Because I see now that Mr. Livingstone has not done his part." She spoke to Mr. Proctor, but her eyes battled piteously with her father's. "Because he is the leader in the temperance society, and if this notice comes from the Knights

of Temperance, it shows that he has not influenced the men as I thought he could. I tell you now in the interests of honor and justice."

The doctor turned from her. "Honor and justice!" he said, with a groan. "Those are not words for your lips to-night, Katherine."

The girl sought the chair-back with her other hand and did not reply. In the dim room her slight figure looked unprotected and lonely, but her head was finely erect. Mr. Proctor found a curious thrill shaking him. He sought for anger; he found only an irrational longing to comfort and shield.

The pause was long, though no one seemed to realize it. It was the doctor who again spoke.

"My daughter conspiring with men like Detiere and Livingstone — and against your property! Mr. Proctor, I have no words to offer you."

Proctor turned from him impatiently. "I am convinced that Miss Katherine has an explanation." Unconsciously he drew nearer the girl. "Perhaps she can make it with less difficulty if I leave the room."

Katherine looked at him with amaze and gratitude that stabbed him. Had she thought him incapable of generosity? The line of her lips quivered for the first time.

"Her explanations are due you, not me," the doctor interposed sternly. "If you have any excuse to offer, Katherine, I command you to make it now."

"Not to me," Mr. Proctor interrupted, "unless

she wishes." He crossed the room and opened the door. "Miss Katherine?"

The girl's shamed step passed him without halting. She bowed, but the eyes that he was suddenly eager to see brighten were drooped.

Dr. Edmister turned with indignation to the younger man. "You take much upon yourself, Proctor," he said.

"And will take more," the young man blazed, "if you hurt her so again. The girl 's flesh and blood, not steel. Think what you said to her! And she 's the heart of honor."

"The heart of honor! And because she dislikes you she connives at the burning of your lumber piles. This from my daughter Katherine!"

"Your daughter Katherine is the heart of honor." Mr. Proctor walked the floor. "What has she done after all? She tried to save Livingstone from what was, to her, an unjust suspicion, but when she found that she 'd made mischief she did n't stop to shield him or herself. She told the truth. And her courage! Listen to what she did for me the other night."

He told the story earnestly, for memory lived again that hostile moment and its swift recoil. The doctor's face softened.

"That was like her," he said more gently. Then the knife turned again. "But how could she have done this! I 've been proud of my daughter, Proctor."

"And rightly. But can't you see? All that

she did was to try to save Livingstone. A woman may always be forgiven that."

"To save Livingstone at your expense. Has she no sense of equity? And it was not a woman's business."

"Everything is a woman's business — at times," Proctor said with some gravity. "When the interests of two men are in balance with a woman, one man or the other must go to the wall. I was the other man."

The doctor turned with squared shoulders. "Preposterous!"

"But it 's not the first time that she 's defended him," Proctor argued, and he sketched Katherine's attitude the morning that he had found her with Livingstone in front of the schoolhouse. "She hurled herself and her theorems at the breach," he concluded, "without a thought."

"But Livingstone!" the doctor protested.

"He 's been her teacher. The situation 's old. It is not a matter that I would choose to discuss, but it seems the explanation. Anything is better than that you should judge her as you do now."

There was silence after this, which the doctor broke with effort. "What do you plan to do, Proctor? The paper, too — what about that? I retract what I said about its unimportance."

The young man waked from what seemed a reverie. "I have n't thought." His tone was abstracted. "Never mind about that to-night. You 'll dine with me on Thursday, doctor?"

"After this?" The doctor looked denial.

"Why not the more? Will you renew my invitation to Miss Katherine? I think that she will understand and come."

The doctor drew himself together. "You are generous," he said. "I am glad to accept your kindness for myself and daughter. We will come."

CHAPTER XII

WHERE JESSIE REIGNED

Mr. Proctor prepared for his dinner with a nervous care which would have amused himself had it been less unconscious. He belonged to the helpless type of men where household matters were concerned and showed, as a rule, a truly Elisha-like indifference as to the methods of his ministering ravens; but now, spurred by the memory of Katherine's assured announcement that this was to be an occasion of the world worldly, he gave his menu serious consideration.

The task before him was more unfamiliar than the scaling of logs had been six months before, but his memory, stimulated by study of a cook-book which he stealthily extracted from a drawer in the kitchen table, served him well, and he surveyed his completed list of dishes with a smile born of the anticipatory complacence of his palate.

"This is to be a dinner, not a supper," he explained to Jessie when he carried the list to her for consultation, "and you must have the plates brought in at different times, as I have marked here, not put on the table all at once. You can hire all the help you need, and I would like you to find a young girl to wait on the table. We will have the soup" —

Where or how he would have the soup was never known. Jessie, who had been stolidly washing dish towels throughout his explanation, was halfway down the steps, one hand full of clothespins, the other supporting an unsteady structure of moist toweling, and the angle of her neck suggested uncompromising deafness.

The futility of annoyance was a lesson concerning which the man was fast growing letter-perfect. Since he had learned that his moods were a matter of complete indifference to all about him, his temper had greatly improved he told himself, and he now awaited Jessie's return with patience compounded full as much of amusement as of resignation.

His second essay was more discreet. "You know how to cook all of these things so well that I want to show Dr. Edmister what you can do," he cajoled, but the look which Jessie turned upon him painted so visibly the childishness of his palpable flatteries that he respected her wordless scorn.

"What shall we have, then?" he asked at length, with the meekness of utter defeat. "I suppose that you are willing to give them something to eat?"

Jessie paused in her vindictive scrubbing of the top of the kitchen table and again found her tongue.

"Dinner is dinner; supper is supper," she said, pulling at her tightly rolled sleeves, and with this darkly oracular remark she turned toward her

employer a look which experience told him betokened a listening ear.

"Very well, call it supper, then. Here, take the list, and select the dishes that you 're willing to have, but please don't leave out either the chicken or the whitefish."

Jessie took the extended list, only to let it drop to the floor, and turned again to her scrubbing.

"Whitefish is grand eating," she said, as she stopped to pour the soft soap upon her cloth, "but you 'll find it awful messy on the same plate with chicken."

The suggestive industry of her pose discouraged further conversation, and Mr. Proctor made the most of his toppling dignity as he retreated to his room. If he were an oppressor, the whirligig of time in Jessie's hands was bringing odd revenges.

He was apparently deep in his papers when the door of the study softly opened and Jessie's profile showed at the enlarging crack.

"We 'll have riz biscuit for supper to-night," she said casually, her one visible eye directed toward the ceiling, "and I dunno as I care, after all, if you do smoke in the parlor."

The thoughts which Jessie had interrupted had not concerned themselves wholly with papers. There was a question mark in Mr. Proctor's mind whenever he thought of Dr. Edmister and Katherine, and he was considering it now. The appeal in Katherine's face would not leave him. How had her father answered her? His own share, too, in the conversation left a prickling memory. Why

had he been so zealous in suggesting explanations for the girl's conduct? A lurking sense of proportion whispered that he had been rude.

Dr. Edmister's face, as he saw it the next evening, silenced his doubts. To all intents it was the same — serene, half-humorous, indulgent. The doctor's manner to his daughter, too, betrayed no change. Mr. Proctor felt relief. Katherine's attitude toward himself mattered little now. Yet he had thought that she might meet him with a franker smile.

Supper materialized as fried chicken, biscuit light as the puffballs of the woods, and mashed potatoes that frothed over the curving edges of the dish. It was not a meal that permitted of apology, and the story of frustrated social ambitions, which the host had reserved as the climax of his entertainment, seemed so out of place that he suppressed it. It may have been that Karen's presence changed his perspective. At all events, the tale lost humor in his eyes.

The hour at the supper table was a pleasure so distinct that Mr. Proctor marveled that he should have deferred its enjoyment for so long. It was good to play the host once more, and two of his guests, at least, were in an appreciative humor. Of Katherine's attitude he was not so sure. Could her father have told her of what had been said about Livingstone? Impossible! He put the thought away, yet with it he could not dismiss his irritation. Since he had overlooked his private wrongs to offer the olive branch of this evening's

hospitality, it was absurd of the girl to build a barrier of reserve between them. With Karen he had no doubts. She talked little, but her ready laughter filled the pauses with tinkling music more effective than speech, and her hair was the color note of the lamp-lit room.

"You 'll have a wild time at Birch Creek next week," the doctor said, as they lingered at table. "The Belgians will be having their harvest dance. Will you try to run the mill?"

"Will I try to run the mill?" Mr. Proctor echoed perplexedly. "Why, yes, — though Cole did say something about expecting that Detiere would shut down on Saturday. I don't like to have him do it, for we 're crowded, but at the same time I 'd be sorry to run counter to the scruples of the men. It 's a semi-religious festival, is n't it?"

Dr. Edmister smiled confidentially at the cornice. "It 's the kermess, properly. Kirk means church, mess means mass," he answered with categorical evasion.

Mr. Proctor looked interested. "I 'm familiar with the Flemish kermess," he said. "It 's a picturesque custom."

Dr. Edmister's hand covered his mouth, but his eyes were regretful. "Look here, Proctor," he warned, "remember that a harvest festival in these pineries is one thing; a fête in Flanders is another — or looks so in an engraving. We 're talking at cross-purposes. You 'll be wiser at the end of the week. As to running your mill, you 'll have not a word to say about it."

Karen's mouth looked reproach. This was not conversation to her mind, and she let Mr. Proctor hear her sigh. He turned to her at once. "Have you been out to Birch Creek, Miss Karen?"

Karen shook her head. "I'm not interested in Birch Creek," she said with some complacence. "Mr. Livingstone says it is a sink of iniquity."

Despite his wish, the schoolmaster's name drew Proctor's eyes to Katherine. He was rewarded by a face that again showed animation; the reformer in the girl had waked.

"Why should n't one be interested?" she demanded dogmatically. "They 're human beings at Birch Creek — sink of iniquity or not."

"But I don't like to talk about such people." Karen looked daintily petulant. "Mr. Livingstone says it is n't a nice place for a lady to go."

A shadow strayed across the talk, and the remainder of the evening passed less happily. Karen's somewhat assured use of the schoolmaster's name suggested a new complication to Proctor's mind. It came to him suddenly that Katherine must be lonely. For even Karen had just shown that she did not comprehend. He looked over at Katherine and remembered once more that he had arranged for this evening at her suggestion. He was regretful that it did not give her pleasure.

"As to the paper Heinrich brought you," Dr. Edmister asked as he was leaving — "what have you done?"

Mr. Proctor welcomed the advance. He had

feared that the doctor might choose to make the matter a forbidden topic.

"Nothing," he said, "beyond doubling the night watch at the mill and warning the men that they must be more careful about flying sparks. They can read a warning into that if their consciences are sensitive. Everything is going well. My mill is sawing lumber eleven hours a day, and I 'm unmolested personally. What more would you?"

"I would several things — among them that this matter had not come between us. My daughter" —

"Has done no harm. I 'm sorry that you gave that a second thought. I did not. Won't you forget it?"

The doctor smiled at the phrase. "Complaisant memories seem the mode among us. Perhaps it 's as well. Here 's a curious incident. Detiere came to me the other day professionally. Climbed up to the house and asked me to prescribe for him."

Mr. Proctor whistled. "Detiere sick!"

"Sick! No. Absolutely the most perfect thing physically it was ever my good fortune to see. I felt as I might if a mastodon had wandered in and asked for a nerve tonic. No, he simply wanted medicine — he said. But Louis Detiere developing imagination as a hypochondriac is a situation."

"Not a pleasant situation," Mr. Proctor began, but the girls were entering the room, and he completed his thought with another half-smothered

whistle. "By the way," he went on, "when do you order your sign?"

The doctor smiled as he lighted his lantern. "Heinrich is a wicked and perverse generation," he said. "I can't convince him that there 's work enough for Dr. Griggs and myself, and the more good men the better for the village. Well, tell me about the kermess. You 'd better go out and see it."

CHAPTER XIII

THE KERMESS

THE next week brought business to drive the kermess from Mr. Proctor's mind. It was on Wednesday that Cole recalled it to his somewhat perplexed consciousness.

"Detiere's running yet — full handed," Cole commented.

"Well, why not?" Mr. Proctor asked sharply. "Why not?"

"It mostly happens that the men are too drunk to work by the middle of the week. Xavier sent a load of beer out last week. They have meetings and dances every night. They 'll have to knock off by Saturday."

Proctor's lips pressed more firmly. "Find out for me whether they stop work on Saturday."

It was late Saturday afternoon when Cole came again. The shingle mill had been running all day, he said, and his face was nonplussed. The messenger had reported Detiere as swearing like a fiend and driving the men like a tiger, and Cole repeated the similes with relish.

"He never did it for your uncle," he wondered. "You don't suppose" — his heavily moulded face grew more mobile — "Detiere was at the last meet-

ing at the schoolhouse. You don't suppose that he could have experienced a change?"

Mr. Proctor shook his head. Detiere's face seemed suddenly before him, summoned at sound of his name. His dominant overflowing personality was more than a memory. He was there, rakish, defiant, viciously handsome as a fallen angel.

"No, Cole. Don't hunt for a convert there. I'm glad that he kept the mill going, though. I'll speak to him about it. I'm going to drive out to the festival to-morrow, and I may see him."

Cole's teeth gleamed. His sense of humor lay deep, but it could be stirred.

"Yes," he said, "you'll probably see him."

It was sundown of the next day when Mr. Proctor reached Birch Creek. The dusty road that ran through the clearing was empty, and the buildings looked deserted. He stopped before the boarding-house and shouted vigorously, but the whine of a chained dog was the only response. A cow, attracted by the clamor, came slowly toward him, and laying her head across the log-railed steps, mooed plaintively that it was milking time and she had been forgotten. Still no one came. Mr. Proctor pondered. The Catholic church was a half mile beyond the settlement. If the people were there at vesper service, he would await their return.

He tied his horse and looked for a point of vantage. The ground back of the mill rose slightly for a few hundred yards, and he made his way to the top of the incline.

"'Ah! qu'il est beau le Régiment,
Des Carabiniers de Belgique!'"

The song reached him as he seated himself on a low stump. He was just in time, and as he looked toward where the road plunged again into the timber, a swelling dust cloud heralded the singers.

The sun, balancing upon the summit of the forest wall, left Mr. Proctor in deep shadow, and slanted redly on the winding road below, so that the dust-shrouded procession danced into view through a spraying shower of gold.

"'Boire et chanter, aimer et rire.'"

It was a procession of Bacchantes. Men and women were there, gray heads and baby faces, but all seemed elfin in the license of their mirth. Laughing and stumbling they danced along, their figures magnified by the dust haze to mythical proportions. Their arms were around one another, and the wind played with their disordered hair. Not all of them were singing; ribald laughter punctuated jests that the kindly air refused to carry to the watcher on the slope above.

Before them, his dark-curled head bent with maudlin laughter, Louis Detiere led the way. In his arms lay a woman, her lagging weight resisting the ardor of his movement, but no burden could entirely hamper the grace of a step that a dancing satyr might have envied. With all the noticeable figures in the company his was the compelling one. He was there, as in the mill, the governing note.

"'La Belgique et la liberté!'"

The column passed through the settlement, and the voices dimmed. The sun dropped behind the screening forest. Mr. Proctor was alone.

He untied his horse, in an unwonted mood of analysis. Somehow Katherine's cry, "They 're human beings!" battled with his distaste for what he had just seen. Yes, it might be well for him to see more. This had been but prelude. He had learned from the random talk of the revelers that they were on their way to the Detiere place. He would wait for an hour and follow.

Twilight had passed when he reached Detiere's clearing. The harvest moon, yellow and languorous, looked over the treetops, and its gentle glamour disguised the squalor of the refuse-strewn dooryard. The dancers were before him. The squeak of a fiddle sounded above the shuffle of feet, and wavering squares of light marked open windows.

He tied his horse to a tree — the log fence did not suggest permanent anchorage — and stood by an open window. The dancers had passed all recognition of exterior impressions, and he was reasonably secure from observation.

The house had apparently but two rooms, into the larger of which he was looking. Its furniture had been removed, and its pine floor, black with unmentionable usage, furnished insecure footing for a crowd of reeling men and women. At one end of the room, the musician, a withered old man with a nutcracker face, held his fiddle high upon his shoulder to protect it from the elbows of the trampling crowd, while at the other, unplaned

boards mounted upon hogsheads supported a line of beer kegs, their faucets dripping a seductive stream into the blackened tin cups below.

The room beyond seemed, from glimpses caught through the open door, to be piled high with tousled heaps of babies. Many of their elders, too, had passed from torpidness to slumber. Even in the room where they were dancing, figures sprawled upon the floor.

It was a wavering picture. Lanterns flared uncertainly from the rafters, and candles tottered in the crannies of the logs. The broken shadows of the dancers leaped upon the shaking walls.

Again Louis Detiere was chief. He danced incessantly, and his activity seemed an effect of mechanism. When one partner dropped exhausted, he seized another. The men gave way before him with scowls; their befogged brains did not have wit enough to turn their resentment to action. He drank, as did the others, but what would have made a weaker brain sluggish served but to stimulate him afresh. He was license incarnate — the embodied spirit of animal exuberance unhampered by a hint of mind.

The revelry was at its height when a high treble call palsied the roisterers. Paul Livingstone was standing in the centre of the room, and though his face was white and his figure shaking, his voice was clear and firm.

"Repent!" he cried. "Repent! Daughters of Jezebel, sons of Belial, I call upon you in the name of the Most High God."

For a moment the shock held the company. No one had seen Livingstone enter, — even Mr. Proctor, at the window, had not noticed his soft-footed approach, — and the supernatural in his appearance gave him a short respite. Then a murmur rose, like the protest of a bees' swarm. Jezebel was as good a name as any other, but they objected to intrusions. A line of old army muskets leaned against the wall, and one of the men walked toward them. There were threatening fists and a muttering of Belgian oaths, but Livingstone's voice persisted.

"Hell lies naked before you! Repent ye, while there is yet time! Ye are now cursed before God, but He will forgive even unto the uttermost. Turn, children of Sodom, for the Master calls!"

"Hold on!" called Louis Detiere. He had been standing rigid, his eyes narrowing; now his figure relaxed, and he took the centre of the floor. "Hold on!" There was something like amusement in his face as he studied Livingstone. "I don't understand your lingo, and I don't know what you 're here for, or who asked you to come," — he stopped to call down upon the intruder a flood of descriptive oaths, — "but you said something about masters. Now I 've one word. You ain't the one to talk to me about masters. Who kept the mill running all week and did fair square days' works for the man that paid him wages? That 's the master I know about — the one I work for — and I ain't too drunk yet to know the dirty work you 're doing him. I know your meetings where

you put blankets to the windows because you 're afraid you 'll be shot — you talk a lot about shooting. I know your paper on the tree — boy's play because you don't dare use a knife in the open — and I know your white-livered doctor." He stopped to spit in the face of the man before him, and an interlude of profanity stayed his accusations. "You ain't worth killing, else I 'd do it now. Besides, I want you. Tell Cole from me that I may be a drunken Belgian, but there ain't any under-handed crookedness in my crew. That 's more than he can say. Tell him so."

Mr. Livingstone had listened patiently with unseeing gaze. Now he raised his eyes.

"Peace, child of wrath," he said. "I hear you not. I " —

A blow across the mouth stopped him, and Detiere pushed a swelling face nearer.

"Will you tell Cole what I told you?" he roared.

The man in Livingstone vanquished the mystic. "No!" he shouted in turn. "I carry no messages for liars."

The force of his tone gave him sudden ascendency, and reason snapped in Detiere's brain. His look spoke murder, and Mr. Proctor jumped through the window at the sight. He was not too soon. Detiere had seized a musket, and grasping it by the stock, was swinging it around his head. Livingstone looked up. He withered in the second needed for the bludgeon to descend, and no one called him coward.

But the musket did not reach Livingstone. Proctor's scrambling rush was made in time for him to catch the weapon in its downward sweep, and his arm, though beaten backward by the impetus, held the musket firm. The sodden company drew back. If the first appearance had been disturbing, this was in the nature of a miracle, and they breathed hard as they crossed themselves.

Detiere alone showed no surprise. His teeth gleamed under tight-pulled lips, but he made no sound, and grasping the gun barrel with both hands, he tried to wrench it from the man before him. There was a moment's tableau. The men were of a height, and they wrestled eye to eye. Light hair to dark brow, they stood in contrast; it seemed the eternal conflict of sun and shadow, and the dullest were stirred. But it was an unequal contest. Proctor's right arm was numbed by the blow of the musket, and it soon swung helpless at his side.

"Run, Livingstone!" he called over his shoulder. "I can't hold out much longer! Run, man — I 'm all right!"

The scowl on Detiere's mercurial face shifted, like shadows on a pool. With a burst of noisy laughter he dropped the musket.

"Run! Run! He run five minutes ago. You are strong, Mr. Proctor." He beamed admiration from a face that held no memory of the anger of the moment before. "I 'm sorry that I hurt your arm."

Proctor walked to the wall and replaced the

musket without speaking. His arm was painful, but that Livingstone had deserted was more so. It made the whole scene unnecessary, belittling.

"You would n't enjoy prison, Detiere," he said with brevity of accent. "You 'd find it confining. But mend your ways, if you mean to keep out of it. I can't be around to save you every time."

"So?" The Belgian smiled with undisturbed good humor. "You are a strong man. Sacristi!" He examined Proctor's muscles with an eye that paid tribute to their power. "I work the men all this week, Mr. Proctor. Cole said I could n't."

"Yes, you did well this week, Detiere. Now do better and stop this orgy." Mr. Proctor swept the room with a glance of contempt that was lost on the crowd before him. "Do it because I ask it. You should be grateful to me to-night. Send these people home."

"Oui," Detiere blithely assented. He spoke a few sharp words, and the women turned away. The men — such of them as were not beyond hearing — shrugged their shoulders, but they slouched toward the door. "They go," their leader announced to Mr. Proctor. "Next time" — his tone was insinuatingly gentle — "maybe you come earlier."

Proctor walked away to hide his unwilling smile. "Next time," he called back, "I will come earlier, and I 'll bring the sheriff."

A few rods from the door he met Livingstone. "Stop, Livingstone!" he called. "Don't go back there."

The schoolmaster wheeled. "You 're hurt?"

"I? No. But why are you going back? You left once."

"I left to go for help. I was coming back to aid you."

"Where did you go for help?" Proctor persisted. Had the schoolmaster's pride overcome his cowardice? Why this return?

Livingstone looked troubled, but did not finesse. "I went for Dr. Griggs. He 's out there, but he would not — He did not think it best to return."

"I understand," said Mr. Proctor with sudden cordiality. "Won't you drive home with me? I came alone."

"I 'm with Dr. Griggs," Livingstone reluctantly replied. He followed to the road and watched Mr. Proctor untie the horse. "I suppose that I — that I owe my life to you. I 'm very much obliged."

Mr. Proctor picked up the reins. "That 's all right, Livingstone. Don't think of it again. I 'm glad, though, that I happened to be playing Peeping Tom. Good-night."

"Good-night. But — Mr. Proctor! Mr. Proctor! Just one moment!"

"Well?" Mr. Proctor leaned from the carriage, and the moonlight showed him the schoolmaster's face distorted with resolve.

"Mr. Proctor, I cannot let my gratitude to you interfere with my duty. I cannot. I warn you of that. I cannot do it."

"By no means," said Mr. Proctor. The friend-

liness of his tone was accented by the sight of a portly figure crouching by a roadside bush. "Do your duty wherever you see it. May I suggest that at this moment duty lies in the rescuing of your friend Dr. Griggs? He is under the bush there, and he appears to be in pain."

Mr. Proctor's arm seemed less painful as he drove away. To have proved Dr. Griggs a coward was a gain as well as a pleasure. It removed what he had thought of as a factor in his plans.

CHAPTER XIV

AN AWAKENING

Mr. Proctor's wrenched arm wrought the unexpected. The village was impressed. The story of his encounter with Detiere spread and lost no picturesqueness in the telling. He found himself in an Indian summer of esteem.

"I've learned the road to popularity," he said to Dr. Edmister, who was caring for his arm. "I expected to begin next summer with drastic measures, but now I'll knock a man down once a month and let the labor agitators do their worst."

The doctor did not smile. "I'm glad that it happened," he said with some gravity. "The people have underestimated your strength. I welcome every accident that shows them the real man."

Mr. Proctor was going down the trail when he met Katherine. He was aglow from his talk with her father, and his retrospective smile momentarily included her. Their greetings were wont to be perfunctory.

The girl met his smile with a rill of song and eyes that strove vainly for sobriety. He placed himself in her way.

"I'm almost tone deaf," he said severely, "and

I don't wish to be suspicious, but isn't that 'Lo! the Conquering Hero?'" —

Katherine sat down on a log and stopped to laugh. "But I liked it." Her look hailed him as a comrade. "I'm so glad that you did it!"

This was a new Katherine, and Mr. Proctor took the other end of the log. "Et tu!" he groaned. "Well, there's no escape if destiny calls, but a pugilist's life never attracted me."

Katherine sat up straight. "Oh, I didn't mean the catching of the gun — though that was all right too. I meant that I was glad of the other thing — that the man was afraid of you. He was afraid of your self-control. He could n't understand your taking a blow meant for another man. He would never be afraid of mere strength."

"Energy is substance with Detiere," said the man somewhat absently. He neglected the personal application of the girl's speech in wonder at her vivid face.

"I'm afraid that I'm like him. I understand his worship of force." The girl curled her palms together gleefully and looked up with a frank demand upon his discernment.

It was difficult to respond. A new and wholly unexpected impulse of admiration was crowding Mr. Proctor's tongue to flattery. Yet he must not repel her advances. Why had she never shown him this side of herself before?

Katherine rose. "Mr. Livingstone should be very grateful to you," she said formally. The glow with which she had welcomed the conquering hero had faded.

Mr. Proctor rose too, with a laugh for his own egotism. He had been obtuse. Of course Katherine would show him new friendliness; he had saved Livingstone.

He was not smiling as he walked down the trail. The girl's attitude might be admirably consistent, but he was annoyed. He paid somewhat dearly for his friendship with Dr. Edmister in these prickly encounters with the daughter. Yet why try to find excuse for her phases? He was exaggerating, losing his perspective. A few weeks more and he would be in the world again, and this life of petty irritations and childish mysteries would seem as immaterial as a dream.

He was dreaming of that world some mornings later when he was wakened by a splatter of pebbles against his window. He looked out into a chill dawn.

"Who is it?" he called.

A cough answered him, and Livingstone stepped from the shadow of the house.

Proctor stayed his exclamation. "What is it?"

Livingstone motioned to silence. "Come," said his gesture.

Mr. Proctor dressed with some amusement. How characteristic of Livingstone! Pebbles and secrecy consorted well with the man.

He met the schoolmaster at the gate and followed him in silence. Livingstone led him past the mill to a distant corner of the yards, then stopped and looked about him. No one was in

sight. He drew Mr. Proctor to his side and pointed to a pile of lumber.

For a moment the schoolmaster's air of tragedy was justified in the mill owner's eyes. A cone of sticks lay at the edge of the lumber, and the boards above showed stains of oil.

Proctor bent to the pile. It was nicely placed. The prevailing winds would carry the sparks toward the mill. He rose and held out his hand.

"You have done me a great kindness, Livingstone. I am the more reproached that I once misjudged you." His voice was alight with gratitude.

Livingstone's gravity took a deeper tone. "It was contrary to my advice — distinctly contrary."

Mr. Proctor reconstructed his point of view. "I am greatly in your debt," he said with some restraint.

"No. That is what I wish to speak of. You are not in my debt, nor I, I hope, in yours. You saved my life the other evening — I suppose," — Livingstone's voice stumbled at the admission, — "and now I have saved your mill. Are we, perhaps — do we seem to you to be quits?"

Proctor stared. Was Livingstone developing as a humorist? No, the growing light showed the schoolmaster's face unflinchingly composed. Mr. Proctor's glance dropped to the cone of sticks. That, at least, was not travesty.

"An eye for an eye?" he queried. "Certainly, we are quits. Since this is a business matter — an exchange — I call the balance in your favor."

Livingstone bowed. "It is not a case for inclination," he said. "The Bible reads plainly. I cannot be beholden to one whose works are unrighteousness."

Mr. Proctor spent the morning in his office thinking. He had a business crisis to meet, but his mind had room for Katherine Edmister and Livingstone. What troubles might this fiery child not bring upon herself if she persisted in her defense of the schoolmaster? It was as if in answer to his thought that, about ten o'clock, Katherine knocked at his door.

He placed a chair for her with an air that tried to be usual and failed. Her embarrassment did not bode well for the interview. What new complication was he to meet?

"Father was n't at home," she explained hurriedly, "and I could n't wait for him. I had to come. I 've seen Mr. Livingstone. He told me — about the lumber."

The man's face changed. It had not occurred to him that Livingstone would spread the tale.

Katherine read his silence rightly. "You don't like his having told me. But I don't think that he will tell any one else. Of course he would tell me."

Mr. Proctor tapped the table. All women had their crudities he thought. They seemed denied the reticence that instinct gave to men.

"Don't you go to school?" he asked absently.

Katherine's brows lifted. "No. Father decided about a week ago that knowledge was not seemly for a woman. I 'm a little sorry about the

geometry. However, that is n't what I came to say."

Mr. Proctor leaned back. She had come to make another plea for Livingstone — but for what? He did not feel interested to hear.

"Never mind what you came to say. Don't you think we 're all tired of reasons? Everything in Wilsonport is done with a purpose. Suppose that you forget you had a moral."

To his surprise she showed him a flitting smile.

"You 're trying to save me from what you 're afraid I 'm going to do," she said, sobering. "But I 'm not going to meddle again. It 's because I meddled before that I 'm here now. I did n't dream of the mischief I was doing when I did n't tell you about the other fire. I thought it would never happen again, and you are so hard on the men — on the people — that I could n't bear — But I 've tried to keep watch of your lumber. Mr. Heinrich has helped. And Mr. Livingstone promised to tell me if another attempt was made, so he came to me to-day. Then I knew that the trouble was serious, and that I ought to tell you what I 'd found out." She stopped, breathless. Her eyes were clouded.

The young man's eyes were lowered, but he missed no detail of her face. "So hard on the men? Miss Katherine, will you be good enough to explain?" He did not conceal his disapproval. Her shielding of Livingstone he could forgive, but this belated attempt to hide behind another motive roused his contempt.

Katherine's lip escaped from her control, and quivered. His censure, to her mind, was a phase of his anger against the men.

"Yes, you are stern in your judgment of the people." She had not meant to say this, but his face opened the flood-gates, and the words escaped.

"You 're not so much stern, perhaps, as contemptuous, indifferent. That 's much worse. You don't care what happens to the men so long as your — Of course the men have been wrong, wicked, but — but" — She drew herself up and looked toward the door. "I must go. I did n't mean to say this. I 'm sorry about the lumber."

The man rose. His unconscious action barred her way. "What do you know of my dealings with my men, Miss Katherine? Your informant" —

"Oh, but I have n't had an informant! It 's yourself. Can't you see? You hold yourself so remote, so outside it all! I — That 's why I made that — why I did n't tell you about the other attempt. I went to the church to tell you, but I saw you smile" —

"Don't stop!" The young man picked up a book, and dropped it. "You came to warn me, and I? — Don't go. Please. Take this chair. When did I smile?"

"I went to the church and looked through the window, and you smiled — You did n't mean it as disdainful, perhaps, but — you 've always smiled that way since the first day, and it shows that you don't care for the people. I know that you 're

just, and the men are wrong, very wrong, but they work so hard, and they 're so poor ! "

" And I seem as hard to you as that. So hard that you did n't dare trust me. And I thought " —

" But you 're not so hard," she cried, with a rush of penitence. " It 's only that you don't understand. If you only did think of it differently, you could do so much — just as you did at the kermess. I was very wrong. But I hoped too much from Mr. Livingstone."

" Don't stop. Please tell me more. I can't tell you how much I 've been mistaken in some things. Please sit down and tell me what happened that night."

His eyes were searching hers. Her eager face was tear-wet, but he waked to the thought that the day was fair.

She told the story with stormy reiteration of phrase. Her interference — now that she was forced to put it into words — seemed an incredible impertinence, but she did not try to soften it.

Men, piling lumber in the yards, slouched by the window as she talked, and Mr. Proctor watched them. They looked heavy and sullen, and their leather aprons were crusted with dirt. Yet it was for them that this girl was in tears. It did not once come to him that the situation held a touch of the absurd.

" I 've had my lesson," she concluded. " I 've had to think things out. It was man's work that I tried to do, and I am a child. It was good of you not to tell me that the other night. It was so

true that I could n't bear to hear it. But now I 'll have to tell you what I 've found out. That 's the hardest."

"I 've had — I 'm having — my lesson, too, Miss Katherine. As to what you 've found out, don't tell me unless you wish."

"I must wish. It may be important. I overheard — I saw" —

"You found some one in mischief. Perhaps I can help. Was it Yngve Torstenson? Don't answer. Yes, I 've been watching Yngve. Don't add that to your conscience."

The girl's face relaxed; she looked tired. "I must go," she said, with sudden timidity. "You won't think that I meant too much about Yngve?"

Mr. Proctor laid a hand upon her chair. "Wait, it 's my turn. Will you listen, Miss Katherine? I close the mill to-morrow."

"You close the mill?"

"I must reach the men in some way. If they try to burn my mill, I close it. That logic should impress their minds."

"But your loss! Oh, did I do this!"

The man's half laugh seemed fragmentary and illogical. His glance, which had rested on her face, wavered. "Miss Katherine, do you know that you have never before sided with the taskmaster? But I can't take your sympathy under false pretenses. No, I will lose nothing. I am nearly out of logs. I could bring another raft from Douglas Harbor, but that is dangerous work at this season. I have lumber on hand for the

spring trade, and my mill is insured. Do you see?"

Katherine had followed his reasoning with attentive nods, and he went on. "My point of view is still selfish, you see. I tell you, not that I am proud of it, but that I may meet you with honesty. I am simply following the path of least resistance. However, the men will lose little. The work in the woods begins very soon."

The girl's eyes were troubled. "It is good of you to trust me this way, after I have given you so much annoyance."

The man was silent a moment. "You have given me many things this morning — but not annoyance. You say that I 've been hard. Grant that I have, there 's another summer coming." He dwelt on the words, and smiled. "Have you room for faith in me until that time?"

She searched his face for amusement, but found none. "Faith?" she said. "Have you charity? It is the greater. I am afraid that I need it at your hands."

CHAPTER XV

"NEED A BODY CRY?"

MR. PROCTOR'S morning had been idle, but his afternoon did penance for the crime.

At five o'clock Cole called the men together, and dismissed them for the season. He had been well drilled in his interview with Mr. Proctor, and his words were few. An attempt — the second — had been made to burn the mill; therefore it would be closed. Work would probably be resumed in the spring. He did not know. He went away at once, to leave no opportunity for argument.

The men, too, said little. Questions would confess ignorance, and each suspected his mate of greater knowledge. From the standpoint of excitement the closing of the mill made scant impression on the village.

It was mid-afternoon of the next day when Dr. Edmister, driving through the tamarack swamp, found Mr. Proctor by the roadside.

"Partridges?" The doctor looked expectantly at the young man's gun. "I 've heard the rascals drumming."

Mr. Proctor showed an empty game bag. "I 've been estimating the timber. Yes, I 'll be glad to drive back with you."

The doctor watched him leap to the seat. The young man's eyes were shining, and never had his sinewy length of limb seemed more pronounced.

"Why a gun, Proctor? For decorative purposes?"

Mr. Proctor stretched himself. "Yes, it's a stage property. I wished the village to believe I went a-hunting. It's as well for the people not to have too accurate data of my movements. You've heard about the mill?"

"Naturally."

"It's, as I told Miss Katherine, a gallery play. It sends me home earlier and gives me a dramatic exit. I told Miss Katherine" —

"She told me. What does Cole say?"

"Cole's obedient. I tried to show him that his leader is a man of straw."

"His leader?"

"Oh, Dr. Griggs is the spring that moves Livingstone, I think, and even Cole's infected. That's what the winter will do for me. Prove my suspicions, and show whether this unrest is serious. Dr. Griggs can't follow the men into the camps."

"You'll be away till spring? I shall miss you." The doctor's tone, which had worn an edge of restraint, grew more genial.

"I'm coming back in January for a week or more."

The doctor turned. "In January? That's new, is n't it? I'll be glad to see you, Proctor, — you've no idea how long the winter will be, — but

you can't accomplish anything at that time, can you?"

The young man drew a long breath. "I can accomplish my pleasure. I've never seen Wilsonport in winter dress. Then, I ought to go out to my camps."

The doctor shook his head. "Too many miles for a whim. You won't come. But I should welcome you."

"I'll get out here," Mr. Proctor said, as they neared the village. "I've an errand in Torstenson's wood yard." He jumped to the ground, but stopped, his hand upon the seat. "There's one thing, doctor. I mentioned something to you the other night which I have since regretted. I see now that I was wrong. It was a foolish surmise, and it has not been my habit to discuss" — He stopped, frowning at his own circumlocutions.

The doctor examined his whip to preserve his gravity. He had never before seen Mr. Proctor embarrassed, and he had a passing thought that the emotion sat upon the young man well. "About Katherine and Mr. Livingstone?" he assisted. "You see that you were wrong? I thought so. I know my daughter — no, I'm not sure that that statement's correct. I think, however, that I can claim some knowledge of her standards. I did n't consider that Livingstone matter seriously."

"But you took her out of school."

"I told you that so long as she was there I must defend the teacher. Then, too, I may send her away."

"But not before Christmas! Will you write me this winter, doctor?"

"Yes, with pleasure — but you don't leave for some days yet, do you?"

Mr. Proctor smiled at the doctor's perplexity; he understood his own irrelevance well. "On the next Buffalo boat," he said, as he turned away. "I 'll be up before I go."

He leaped the fence of the Torstenson wood yard. Yngve was there, as he had expected, and turned an equally expected scowl.

The man stopped. "I want a business talk, Yngve, and now 's a good time. You 've seemed somewhat interested in my affairs. I 've further information for you. My mill is heavily insured — heavily. The bulk of my timber is near Douglas Bay, and it is an expense and a trouble to raft it from there. It would be to my present advantage if my uncle had chosen Douglas Bay for a mill site. These are facts for your leisure. You might repeat them to the Knights of Temperance Labor Union."

Yngve, for once, did not look angry. "Do you think that I was the one who tried to burn your mill?" His voice shook.

Mr. Proctor lifted his eyebrows. "I don't think any more. I jump to conclusions. It 's a Wilsonport habit, and I 've acquired it."

The next few days saw the lumber stacked for the winter and the plans for the camps arranged. The arrival of the Buffalo steamer found Mr. Proctor with only the good-bys waiting to be said.

It was a dreary day. Winter was threatening, and the air promised snow. Drab clouds wrapped lake and forest. Everywhere was discomfort, yet Mr. Proctor, walking with difficulty on the ridges of frozen ground, showed no pleasure in the thought of his release. It was Olive Cole who discovered the thoughtful regret in his good-by.

"You 're sorry to go away," she cried triumphantly. "I expect we 'll have to go to Karen to find out when you 're coming back."

The remark sent him to Karen with some discomfort. It occurred to him now that he had not been there in some time. His neglect had not been intentional, but the thought of it bred constraint.

There was answering constraint in Karen's manner. Mr. Livingstone was with her, and the atmosphere hastened Mr. Proctor's adieus.

"I 'm — I 'm going to join the church, Mr. Proctor," Karen stammered, as she said good-by.

Livingstone stepped before her. "Karen has said good-by to the world at last," he said. This other good-by was evidently symbolic to his mind.

Mr. Proctor went from there to the house on the bluff. He ran the last part of the way. It came to him sharply that it would be a long time before he could again climb that trail.

Katherine was in the yard, taking a washing from the line, and she worked to the accompaniment of a recitative query. "'Need a body cry?'" she fluted, as she contended with the wind for possession of a flapping sheet. The sheet conquered, her mouth was needed to hold clothes-

pins, but she persevered, withal in broken tones, "'Gin a body kiss a body, need a body cry?'" Mr. Proctor stopped behind her. A wrinkle, that he had worn all day, disappeared, and he looked care free and boyish. The question seemed perplexing, and the girl went back to it. "'Need a body cry?'" she repeated.

"You tempt me to allay your curiosity," Mr. Proctor remarked with colloquial ease. "Experience would prove."

The girl turned so slowly that he knew her to be searching for a retort.

She accepted her defeat. "My repartee is as Scotch as my song," she laughed, as she dropped her burden into the clothes basket. "Won't you come in? I 'm sorry that you 're going away."

"No, I can't come in. I 'll see your father at the steamer, and it 's time for it now. I 'm glad — if you 're sorry. But I 'm coming back in January. Will you be here?"

The girl sat on the edge of the clothes basket, and looked at him. She balanced herself craftily, her chin in her hands. "I 'll always be here, I think. How I 'd like not to be — just for a little time! Have you any idea how I envy you? Not the going nor the coming, perhaps, but the having tried both. You ought to be very happy. Think of your opportunities."

"I do think," the man solemnly replied. "I 've thought of my opportunities steadily for nearly a week. The trouble is, I have n't used them as I might. That 's why I 'm coming back in January."

Katherine's cheeks grew hot. "For nearly a week? It was nearly a week ago that I went to your office. Mr. Proctor, have I — have I anything to do with your coming back in January?"

The man laughed a little. "Yes," he said.

The girl sat erect on her uncertain seat, and raised a troubled face. "I 've been unhappy over what I said to you that day, Mr. Proctor — about your opportunities. And now I 'll be still more so if you come back on that account. For, after all, what can I know about your work with the men? I 've been thinking a great deal lately, and — I 'll never meddle again. I did n't mean the men when I spoke just now of your opportunities. I was thinking how wonderful it must be to know the world as you do. Mr. Proctor, please forget what I said that day!"

Mr. Proctor came close to the edge of the clothes basket. "Miss Katherine," he said soberly, "I don't want to forget that day — nor your share in it. And if what you said determined me to come again in January, believe me that I come — because I wish."

Katherine had her father's eyes. She lifted them now, candid, yet questioning. "Then I 'm very happy that you 're coming back," she said. "And to think that in two days you 'll be out in the world!" She stopped to laugh at herself, and her chin cradled itself in her hands once more. "That 's what I never can realize. We seem so far away — so outside of things! It does n't seem possible that by the end of the week you will be in the whirl."

The man looked down at her. She was humming to herself, and her absent eyes showed that her mind was afield. Her thought was exploring that outside world that chained her fancy.

"The whirl is n't so glittering, after all," he said. "You 're going to be a disappointed, Cinderella, when you reach the ball. I wonder" — his even tone tripped a little — "whether you would let me write to you about it while I am away — tell you how it looks to me now that I 've been out of it for a time."

Katherine stopped humming. "Why — why — It would be very kind of you, Mr. Proctor."

Was this pleasure? It wore the air of embarrassment and surprise. Mr. Proctor drew a long breath.

"But I 'm not a philanthropist, Miss Katherine. I demand my wage. If I write to you I shall expect letters in return. You see the baldness of my ruse. Will you write to me?"

"But I 've never written letters — except, of course, to Adrien, and duty letters to aunts I 've never seen. But perhaps to you — and I would so like your letters" — she looked up in his face, and misread its sudden intensity. "No!" she cried with swift panic. "You 're not saying all that you think again. I 've been mistaken. It 's a jest to you here still, and my letters would be part of it."

A whistle checked the hot denial on the man's tongue. Why say more? Nothing but deeds would convince this girl.

"There 's the steamer." He was the older man once more. "I 'll have to run to make it. Say good-by to Mr. and Mrs. Green for me, please." He held the girl's hand for a moment. "I asked for your faith. It did n't prove — that of the mustard seed, did it? Perhaps I can make it different when I come again. Good-by."

He was some rods down the trail when Katherine started after him.

"Mr. Proctor, Mr. Proctor!" she called.

But the wind carried her words away, and the man ran on unheeding.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DÉBUT OF LADY PATRICIA

JANUARY was still young when Mr. Proctor drove into Wilsonport.

He checked his horse at the edge of the village and turned to the fur-wrapped figure beside him. "There it is, Philip."

The figure laughed. "It 's what I expected. Brown huts and a forest. What in the world did you come back for?"

"Why did you insist on coming with me? I did n't" —

"No, you did n't urge me. Say, Bob, that 's not so bad. Look at the skaters!"

The skaters numbered most of the village, for it was Saturday afternoon, and the ice blue-black. A crowd blackened the shore, and from pier to lighthouse the sun lighted a tropic flowering of scarlet hoods. Mr. Proctor hastened at the sight.

The beat of hoofs brought Jessie to the door. Her face suggested that the unexpected was always the unpleasant.

"This is my cousin, Mr. Cabell," Mr. Proctor explained. "You 'll have to thaw him out carefully, Jessie. I 'm going down on the ice."

Mr. Proctor's springing step as he walked

toward the shore came from a pulse that would not beat calmly. Yes, he had certainly come because he wished. The crowd upon the ice was merry; he caught laughter and scraps of song, and the sound chimed well with his own pleasure. These people were kindly and happy-hearted after all. It was part of his supercilious past that he had thought them otherwise. That he had closed his mill because his men had tried to burn it, slipped from his memory.

The news of his coming ran a furlong before, and he reached the ice the focus of amazed glances. There was silence; so still it was that from out by the lighthouse could be heard the click of ice to steel. Mr. Proctor sturdily told himself that this was embarrassment, and persisted in his greetings. He met but indifferent response, and when the crowd divided, even as the Red Sea, and indicated a path to Karen Torstenson, he took it gladly.

But the end of the path held Mr. Livingstone as well. Karen's cheeks suggested that this was a *contretemps*. She took a step forward, wavered back to the schoolmaster, then stopped to hold out a limp hand.

The months of breezy intercourse with a crowding world dropped away from Mr. Proctor. He was back in the old atmosphere of unexplained hostility and misunderstanding. Again these issues seemed vital.

The people were questioning now, but Mr. Proctor answered absently. He had not traveled for days to talk of the roads. Chevalier, a huddled

bunch of misery, sat on the shore. Where was the dog's mistress?

He did not understand how his eyes found the answer. Katherine was but a blue-crowned speck drifting in from the lighthouse, but he knew her; no gull slanted its strong-winged flight in truer lines.

As her face grew to distinctness, he saw that she was smiling; but smiling as if at her own thought. She paid no heed to the other skaters. Her face seemed older, more reliant. The loneliness of her enjoyment gave her, to Mr. Proctor's mind, a look unexpectedly remote.

She had swayed to the outskirts of the group before she saw Mr. Proctor. There was a surge of something to her face. Was it surprise? The man could not catalogue it, though he looked intently.

She dropped her arms with a little gesture of greeting and dismay, and he went toward her. He had not pictured this meeting with half the village to assist.

"I did n't think you meant it!" She held out a mittened hand.

"I meant it — absurdly. I meant it more and more with every day. I could n't have stayed away."

She looked at him with serious consideration. "Father will be so glad to see you! He 's enjoyed your letters. He was always brighter after they came. This winter — the winters are always long."

He placed his back to the crowd. "The winter has been a century. There were days when I knew that January would never come."

Her lower lip took refuge between her teeth. "Did you really care?" Her eyes raised slowly — but not to where Mr. Proctor's were waiting. "Why, who is that?"

Mr. Proctor turned. "My cousin, Philip Cabell," he said curtly. "You 'll like him, I think."

It would have been churlish not to like the figure that swung down the slight incline. Even in the disguise of the heavy overcoat, it was debonair and youthfully assured.

Mr. Cabell acknowledged the many introductions with smiling suavity, but went straight toward what he wanted. The gleam of Karen's hair had determined his course when he was yet yards away, and a further view made him politely deaf to his cousin's whispered suggestions.

Mr. Proctor turned again to Katherine. Her gravity had vanished; this was the face of the child who had danced with Adrien upon the lighthouse rock. She was looking at his cousin.

"A new species?" he asked.

She laughed with frank confession of her curiosity. "Yes, he is different, but" — her glance came back — "so are you to-day, for the matter of that. No, it 's not your coat. Your manner 's different, and you look so — so — so alert. Mr. Cabell looks the same way — as if he must seize things as they came. It 's the air of the world, I think. Adrien's letters are beginning to sound as you look."

"You, too, are different. Have you grown as much wiser as you are taller? Your father wrote me that you had n't changed. Fathers are poor authorities. I wonder where I can find yours now."

"He 's out in the country. I 'm so glad I look taller." She executed an elaborate dance step on her tottering skates. "Why, that 's father now! See, driving down by the fish shanties! I can skate down there and catch him. He has to go away now, I know, but he 'll want to see you this evening."

She tucked Chevalier under her arm and was away. Mr. Proctor turned to his cousin. "Come, Philip!"

"Whom were you talking with?" Philip asked, as they walked toward the house. "She blew away like thistle-down. I 'd like to skate with her."

"I introduced you. Your wits deserted when you saw Miss Torstenson."

"'T is true, 't is true, — I am undone!" the young man hummed; then he looked at his cousin, and his own face sobered. "See here, old chap," — a caressing tone came to him as easily as to a woman, —"you 're in the dickens of a temper. If I 'm poaching with Miss Torstenson, say so."

Mr. Proctor looked amused. "Oh, to be young enough to see game in every thicket!" he said, with a half sigh.

Dr. Edmister came that evening. Had Mr. Proctor forgotten his friends on the bluff that

they should both look older? It seemed, too, that the doctor's reticence had deepened. Of Mr. Proctor's matters he talked with interest, but the tale of his own winter he put by.

"How long will you be here, Proctor?" he asked at length.

Mr. Proctor studied his answer unduly. "That will depend. A day or a month — as it seems wise. We go to the camps to-morrow morning. I 'll get that over, then play."

Two days later the cousins returned from the camps.

"I had to drag Philip away," Mr. Proctor said to Dr. Edmister, who came down to see them. "He cried for a red cap with a tassel."

"Did you see much of the men?" the doctor asked.

"Really nothing. I had Cole to see, and Detiere. And then, I did n't make this trip to see the men."

"I think that he made this trip to see you, Dr. Edmister," Philip interposed. "I can't find any other reason."

Mr. Proctor looked his annoyance. "What has become of Dr. Griggs?" he asked rather hurriedly. "I suppose he 's still here?"

It was the doctor's turn to look evasive. "Yes, he 's here. What 's this affair you 're giving, Proctor? You 've spread destruction in my household. Karen is there, and the children are dressmaking all over the place. I 've sat on a needle twice already."

"Oh, it 's this infant Philip," Mr. Proctor said, with a shrug of resignation. "He 's interested in types, and insisted that I turn showman. I can't make him see that this is a serious, hard-working life. He acts as if it were a dialect play produced for his benefit."

The doctor smiled; he had seen the glance of affection that passed between the cousins. "I wonder if you know how you 've changed, Proctor," he said. "You 're saying of your cousin what we used to say of you. But this party to-night — is everybody coming?"

"The village — so far as I could include it. You 'll come?"

"Yes, I 'll bring the girls. I 'm glad you 're doing this. It 's what we need — wholesome amusement to bind us together. Even the young people get tired of each other. I don't know when Karen has been at the house before. Well, good-by till evening."

The doctor found his daughter waiting for him. "How do you like him?" she demanded.

The doctor seated himself rather wearily. "This explosion refers to Mr. Cabell? He seems a decent enough youth."

The girl's brows remonstrated. "Oh, is n't he more than that? This is my first party, remember."

"And Mr. Cabell is the party? What about Mr. Proctor?"

Katherine waltzed to the window. "Mr. Proctor is Wilsonport, and hard work, and gravity.

Mr. Cabell is the world and the frivols thereof. I wish that eight o'clock would come."

The doctor pulled his mustache. "Is Karen equally — expectant?"

The girl smiled rather soberly. "Karen is between two fires," she said. "She wants to go — and she does n't. Of course Mr. Livingstone objects to her going. Mr. Livingstone is n't looking well. I wish that his Dr. Griggs would take better care of him."

Her father frowned. "Don't let me hear you say 'his Dr. Griggs' again, Katherine. It is a cheap form of satire and is in very poor taste. Dr. Griggs, remember."

Katherine went over and snuggled her face in her father's neck in one of her rare caresses. "I don't want to remember him," she whispered. "Daddy, you have n't been very busy this winter. Is it a distressingly healthy year?"

Her father pulled her down upon his lap. "Katherine," he said, with gravity that she knew meant emotion, "are you doing Dr. Griggs the honor to be jealous of him for me? If you are, I have lost the fight that I have made for you from babyhood. Small personalities and rivalries are the curse of village life. I can't do much, here in the woods, to equip you for life, but I can at least send you out with broad horizons and a horror — a horror, I say — of petty strivings." The catch in his voice alarmed him, and he stopped with a little laugh. "Will you horror — to please me?" he added, as he stood her on her feet.

"I will horror," she promised firmly, and there were tears of determination in her eyes.

Karen dressed early that evening, and sat, a completed picture, in her blue gown and coroneted braids, but Katherine loitered with the air of one who would prolong a too-fleeting joy.

"There!" She perched upon the bed, and fitted a black satin slipper on a foot whose neatness she eyed with open complacence. "My mother's slippers! I may be Wilsonport as to my head, but these be the feet of sophistication — sophistication of some years back, but still sophistication. If I lose courage when Mr. Cabell speaks to me, I 'll put out a foot, and reassure myself. How do I look, Karen?"

"I don't know," demurred Karen. "Could n't you wear your red dress? It 's real pretty."

"And this is n't pretty?" Katherine went to the mirror, and studied her reflection. Her plain black gown was cut to show an oblong of white throat, and she had edged the opening with gulls' breasts. The slender black-gowned figure, with its bands of shining white, had a look of bizarre distinction which comforted her self-esteem.

"It 's kind of pretty," Karen admitted, "but it 's so queer! Won't Mr. Cabell be astonished?"

"We could n't astonish Mr. Cabell." Katherine executed a pirouette of joy at the thought. "He came here for that express purpose. There! When I get my fan I 'll be ready. I covered an old fan with the gulls' breasts, too. Don't you see, Karen, we 're an interesting sort of aborigine to Mr. Ca-

bell? He 'd consider it quite in character to find us in war paint and feathers. I can't oblige him as to the paint, — I wonder what rouge is like, — but I 've been assembling the feathers against just such an emergency. Let 's see what father says."

Dr. Edmister bent upon them the meditative look that he would have given a new insect. "Karen looks very well," he gravely said, "but you, Katherine, are you quite — quite usual?"

"On the contrary," — she had equal solemnity, — "I am most unusual. The question is, Am I effectively so? If you were a young man, and had come from somewhere into nowhere, what would you say?"

"I don't know. I am an old man, and am very distinctly somewhere. As it is, I should say that you were a stranger. You may be effective, but you are not of my previous acquaintance."

And that was what Mr. Proctor's eyes said when he met the doctor's daughter that evening. Katherine thought that his silence, as he greeted her, was disapproval. But it was not that.

Philip crossed the room, and clutched his cousin by the sleeve.

"Who," he demanded, "is Lady Patricia, and why did n't you tell me?"

"Miss Torstenson? You talked with her the other day."

"I talked with a milkmaid. There she is now, by the way, and does n't she look pretty! But Lady Patricia! She 's a Malbone miniature. Are you going to introduce me or not?"

Mr. Proctor drew in his breath. "If you mean Miss Edmister, go and speak to her. You 've been introduced twice already. But, Philip, don't — don't spoil her."

Mr. Proctor himself found time to spoil no one by undue attention. The response to his invitation had proved embarrassingly feminine. Where were the men? Not all of them were in the camps. And why, if they disdained this hospitality, had they permitted their wives and daughters to accept? Perhaps, Mr. Proctor thought, they could not help themselves; women, he knew, would overlook an antagonism rather than forego a joy. In the mean time, these wives and daughters were his guests, and he had the instinct of the host. The few men who were dancing showed their preferences without check, and he found the binding of the wounds of the neglected an absorbing care.

Katherine was not among the neglected. Philip was with her constantly, and her face was radiant. It was late in the evening before Mr. Proctor could go to her. Her eyes welcomed him, but told him that he had not been missed. He stood in silence for a moment, playing with the feathers of her fan.

"Are you having a good time, Cinderella?" he finally asked.

"The best in my life. The very best in my life."

"Is power so sweet? There 's a world of good times waiting you."

"But never but one first time," her enjoyment bubbled in laughter, "and never but one — I 'm going to tell you something. I 've never known

the feeling of individuality before. I've always had attention at second-hand — it was Karen's first. If she was busy, people — it has n't been men alone — talked to me. Sometimes I've wished, a little bit, that people would come to me first."

"But you've been a child!" The man explored the anatomy of the girl's fan, and a fringe of down fell upon his knee.

"Oh, but children have their rivalries! Not" — she was still smiling happily — "that Karen is to blame that people love her — and Karen is my friend. But she 's had admiration enough to spare this to me, and it has been — pleasant that Mr. Cabell did n't watch Karen while he was talking to me."

"A man's thought does n't always follow his eyes, Miss Katherine," Mr. Proctor said bluntly. "My eyes, for instance, have n't been with you this evening. My thoughts have."

Katherine's ready flush crept even to her throat. "Was I dancing too much with Mr. Cabell? I've no one to tell me these things. Father does n't notice."

The man looked at her resignedly. He felt himself stiffening into the aged relative that she thought him. "My contention is not that you danced too much with Philip," he said sententiously, "but too little with me. Come. I asked Heinrich that the next be a waltz. May I have it?" He rose and bowed formally.

The girl looked perplexed. "Mr. Cabell asked" —

"And Mr. Proctor asks now. Will you come, Miss Katherine?"

Heinrich, playing with half-shut eyes, looked up to see these two together. He hesitated; then changed his melody. It was the air that he had played upon the lighthouse rock that he selected now, and he smiled to himself as he remembered.

Mr. Proctor remembered too, but he did not smile. He had been blind that August day. Could he live it again, Katherine should not say that Philip was the first to pay her tribute.

CHAPTER XVII

A WINTER BLOSSOMING

"LADY PATRICIA and I are planning a skating party for to-night," Philip announced at the breakfast table the next morning. "Too bad you don't skate."

Mr. Proctor pushed his plate away. "See here, Philip, does Miss Edmister permit your — your familiarities?"

"Calling her Lady Patricia? I haven't tried it yet. But I'm going to."

"You 'll not have much time. I think we 'll go back to-morrow."

Philip rose. A sudden tightening of his lips made his face singularly like his cousin's. "I don't want to leave yet, Bob. You know it is n't necessary. You spoke of staying two weeks. We 've planned a lot of things. We go to the lighthouse to-morrow."

"'We' is Miss Edmister?"

"Well, why not? I 've sense enough to appreciate her, if you don't."

"I do appreciate her."

"Not as you do Miss Torstenson. It 's odd that you don't see the difference. You used to be something of — of an epicure about women. And you danced with Lady Patricia only once!"

Mr. Proctor laughed indulgently. "Your dances with her should keep the balance. You 're no epicure in your pleasures, my boy." He walked over, and laid a hand on his cousin's shoulder. "See here, Philip Cabell, I 'm not going to turn you out of my house, and you shall stay as long as you wish, but — Remember, Philip, that you begged me not to stay more than a week. Are you going to change your plans for a girl that you 'll never see again?"

The young man reddened. "Nonsense! It 's the country, and the people — but that girl is all right. You 'll stay?"

Yes, Mr. Proctor would stay, though he questioned his judgment even as he promised. He was irritated with his own feeling of the importance of this decision. Wilsonport, he decided, destroyed his point of view, and gave an air of potential tragedy to the simplest action.

He was late in joining the skating party that evening. When he did, he went at once to Katherine; she had stopped for a moment by the bonfire, Philip beside her.

"Philip has had his share," the man said. "Will you come with me, Miss Katherine?"

"But you 're not skating" — Philip looked at his cousin's feet and whistled. "Better try it alone," he warned.

"Let me help," Katherine interrupted. She took Mr. Proctor's arm, with the avowed partisanship that women give the helpless.

Mr. Proctor timed his stroke to hers without

answer, and soon the fire fell behind. It was a phantasmal world that lay before them, and the moon reigned queen.

"But you do skate, after all," she said.

"Never until to-day. I've practiced out by the lighthouse all the afternoon. I did it that I might skate with you to-night."

She gave him the back of a hood to study.

"I did it," he went on, "not only for the pleasure of being with you, but to convince you that I am sometimes in earnest. You accused me of making everything in connection with Wilsonport a jest."

She turned a curiously sobered face. "I tried before you went away to tell you that I was sorry for that speech. I followed and called, but you didn't hear me."

"And you would have written to me after all?"

Before she could reply, Ferdinante Lauzeone swung across their path. She was skating alone. Her handsome mouth took a straight line as she passed Katherine, and her eyes stared immovably in front.

Mr. Proctor turned to the girl beside him. Her eyes were full of tears. She felt his glance, and her free hand flew to shield her face. But her control had snapped. She dropped on a log that was frozen in the ice at their feet, and hid her face in her hands. Her shoulders told of the sobs that she was struggling to conquer.

The man looked down at her in dumb unhappiness. He could do so little, and he felt so much!

The girl's small figure looked incredibly lonely in the pallid light. Yet all his chivalry begged him to walk warily, not to show the emotion that was clutching him, and that she would read as pity.

She raised a calming face. "Does n't this show that I trust you — though I did n't intend to do it?"

He substituted his expansive handkerchief for her tear-wet one, and helped her to her feet. "You must skate or you 'll take cold," he said, with gentle authority that showed no kinship with his manner of ten minutes before. "And now suppose that you trust me more."

"I 've wanted to cry about this all winter — and have n't. It 's foolish to care so much. But Ferdinante won't speak to me, and others seem to feel the same way. It 's about Adrien. Ferdinante feels that I 've taken him away from her and from his people."

"But he 's at school?"

"They think it 's my influence that sent him there. And perhaps they are right, and it was n't wise for him to go. His letters sound unhappy. But I wish that Ferdinante could know that I would n't take him from her — that I wanted him to have an education that he might do more for his people, not to separate him from them."

"Why is he unhappy?"

The girl smiled a little wearily. Now that the storm had passed, she was the Katherine whom he had seen upon the ice before Philip appeared, — a grave and somewhat lonely looking woman.

"I don't know," she said. "You will understand better than I because you know the world. I 'm afraid that he 's found that education does n't stand for what he expected. He thought it was all that he lacked, and now he finds that there are other — distinctions."

"It 's the old confounding of knowledge with culture, but — poor Adrien!"

"I may be imagining this. He does n't say it. Only he 's talking Socialism and equality of mind. We don't know distinctions here in Wilsonport, and it 's hard to remember them."

"But that is n't all, Miss Katherine."

"No," she looked at him with the frankest confidence, "it is n't. But I think that I 'd better not tell you the rest now. In the spring, perhaps, I will, for it 's about father. There 's Karen. Can we skate that way? I 'd like to speak to her."

They were within a few strokes of Karen when the man who was skating with her turned his head. Katherine stopped. "That is Mr. Livingstone," she said softly. "Let 's go the other way."

Mr. Proctor did not move. "Is Mr. Livingstone — unpleasant? Why should n't we speak to Karen?"

The girl's brows lifted. "Reasons are Wilsonportish?" Then she dropped her flash of lightness. "It 's not Karen's fault that Mr. Livingstone does n't like to have her with me. And I can understand his side of it. I can't look at life as he does, and he thinks my ways — mischievous.

Though he should know that I would n't influence Karen."

"And Karen obeys him, while you stay on that hill alone!"

Katherine stiffened ever so slightly. "That hill is home — and Karen does come to see me. She was there yesterday. But Mr. Livingstone makes her unhappy if he sees her with me."

"Is their engagement announced?" the man asked.

"We don't announce engagements in Wilsonport. We have 'understandings.' Don't think I 'm lonely, Mr. Proctor. I have n't cried all winter as I did to-night. I don't know why I did it. And I 'm having such a good time since you and Mr. Cabell came!"

In some way the air cleared at the sound of Philip's name. The girl's mouth quirked into dimples at thought of this good time, and her glance sought the shore. Philip was standing by the fire, his arms folded in Napoleonic loneliness. It was an attitude that needed no commentary, and even Mr. Proctor laughed.

Katherine laughed too. Her face broke into rollicking youth and denied all memory of her tears.

"Suppose that we skate faster." She dropped his arm, and executed an elaborate spiral for sheer joy in her skill. "I want to run away from my perplexities."

Mr. Proctor turned their course toward the fire. Katherine would not run far from her perplexities,

he saw, if he ran by her side. It was Philip who, by his very lack of knowledge, stood for rest and forgetfulness. He gave her into Philip's keeping, with the sharp consciousness that her eyes had again grown happy.

Not that he resented her happiness. Until her tears had unmanned him, it had not come to him how vital it was to his own well-being that this girl should always smile. The hot impulse to assert his own claims passed. His longing to see this wayward, frank-eyed child had brought him many miles; his deeper new-born longing to save the child from the burdens of her fast-crowding womanhood tied his hands now that he was here. For she had given him trust, confidence. The simplicity of her faith in him pledged him to the attitude of confessor for a time. And the spring was coming.

"Will you send your daughter away before spring?" he asked the doctor the next day. "You spoke of it at one time."

The doctor's eyes fell. "There are obstacles that I had not foreseen. It looks increasingly difficult to arrange her going."

Mr. Proctor stiffened his resolve. "Dr. Edmister, is anything wrong? I may be fanciful, but I've been disturbed by" —

"By what I haven't said?" The doctor laid his hand for an instant on the young man's shoulder. "Don't mind my silence, Proctor. I'm cursed with a dumb devil of late. But it's good to have you here! No, things haven't been quite

as I 'd wish them, but — I 'll talk it over with you in the spring. It is n't anything that touches your business, of course, else I 'd tell you now."

"The truth is that what touches your household touches my business, — or what I should like to make my business," the young man dared. "I 'll go with you, if you 're going home. I want to see Miss Katherine."

But the horseman who brought the tri-weekly mail was standing before the post office, and his bag had letters for Mr. Proctor. Mr. Proctor read them, and snapped them into his pocket.

"It means leaving to-morrow," he said, "and riding out to see Cole this afternoon. I thought I had my wires better laid."

Yet he went first to the house on the bluff. Katherine sat with Philip in the living-room, but Mr. Proctor went at once to her side.

"Will you come in the other room with me?" he asked. "I want to see you alone."

Katherine followed instantly. Her face, as the man saw to his swift chagrin, paled a little.

"I wish that I did n't always do the wrong thing with you. I did n't mean to frighten you. It 's just that I learned five minutes ago that I must leave to-morrow, and I wanted to see you first."

The girl's eyes questioned.

"It 's only this. I have to ride to the camp to-night, so must talk fast. Miss Katherine, I 've been distressed over what you told me the other night. I can supply a great deal that you did n't

say. I hoped to talk with you again, and at length. But I 've time for only one question. I must leave now, but if I come back — in a few weeks, say — can I be of service? Will you let me come? Can I do anything?"

The girl turned from him, and hid her face against the door.

"No, no!" she said. "You can't do anything. But to think that you would do this for us!"

"You mean that absolutely? You wish me not to come?"

"I mean absolutely that it would be unwise for you to come. Indeed, Mr. Proctor, it would n't do. It would n't do on your own account. Your men" —

"My men hate me. The few who are here refused to dance under my roof. But that does n't matter. I will make it different in the spring. Nothing is of consequence now, but that something has hurt you and your father. What, I cannot understand."

"Don't try to understand. Perhaps it will change before spring. And you would have come back for father!"

"Not for your father alone. You are giving me confidence. It has been hard-won. Will you trust me again in the spring, Katherine?"

He had never before forgotten the prefix. Her color flamed, but she gripped her hands hard, and forced her eyes to meet his own with candor.

"Yes," she said, "I will trust you again in the spring."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GATE IS BARRED

Spring is an elastic term; Mr. Proctor understood it to mean the first steamer of the season.

The steamer was unexpected, and there were few men upon the pier. Mr. Proctor greeted them briefly. Whether his greetings were returned was not of moment. What was of moment was that he had not heard from Dr. Edmister in some time, and that he was going at once to the house on the bluff.

He went up the trail with unseeing eyes. Summer beckoned from among the budding birches, but the sorceries of the woodland were not for him that day.

Vision returned rudely. He reached the doctor's gate, to find it barred. A conspicuously lettered scarlet-fever sign was nailed to the bar, and a note beneath begged all who read to respect the quarantine.

Mr. Proctor considered the notice long, and with frowning intent. Once he placed a hand upon the fence as if to vault it. In the end he walked rapidly down the trail.

As he passed the schoolhouse the children were singing; Livingstone would be within. Fear,

which ran hot behind Mr. Proctor, pushed him up the steps. What matter that Livingstone was unfriendly! He was seeking a voice that could answer questions. As well Livingstone as any.

He stepped to the open door. "One question, Livingstone! I've been up to the doctor's. Who is ill?"

The schoolmaster's surprise made him neglectful of his dignity. "Ill? There's nobody at Dr. Griggs's. He just went by."

It seemed a senseless evasion, but Mr. Proctor's voice was even.

"I meant Dr. Edmister. Is he ill?"

The light of curiosity in Livingstone's face showed that he had been misjudged. "We always think of Dr. Griggs when any one says 'the doctor.' I was not aware that Dr. Edmister was sick. What is the matter?"

Mr. Proctor went down the steps without speaking. He had no room in his thought to wonder at Livingstone's ignorance.

An unusual number of people were abroad in the one street. The camps had closed early for lack of snow, and the men were idle; they lounged in red-shirted groups along the muddy highway.

"Olson! Swanson!" Mr. Proctor called. "Wait!" He reached the men. "There is a scarlet-fever sign at Dr. Edmister's. Who is ill?"

The men shook their heads. As with Livingstone, genuine interest stirred their eyes.

"It might be the doctor," one ruminated. "I ain't seen him down town in I don't know when."

Mr. Proctor turned. His face was set toward the bluff. Barred gates had no meaning for him now.

"Hold on, Mr. Proctor," a man called. "There 's Dr. Edmister coming out of your house."

The moment that passed for Mr. Proctor before he could grasp Dr. Edmister's hand gave him time to grow haggard.

"Is Katherine worse?" he demanded.

"Katherine! Katherine is all right. What is the matter, Proctor?" The doctor's lips, too, were gray. His tone was almost irascible.

"Katherine is all right?" Mr. Proctor searched the doctor's face incredulously. "But the sign on your gate" —

"You have been there already?" The doctor turned back, and his eyes were dim; then he squared his shoulders. "No, it is n't Katherine. It 's the little Torkildson girl. She lived with the Murphys on the Birch Creek road. They refused to give her proper care, so I had to take her home. I 'll go back to the house with you for a moment. Jessie has heard that you are here, and is lighting a sacrificial fire for you in the front room. I thought that the first steamer would bring you. You 're looking well, Proctor."

The doctor himself was not looking well. His step, as he followed Mr. Proctor to the study, was inelastic.

"Have you been ill this winter, doctor?" Mr. Proctor repented his bluntness even as it passed his lips.

"Ill? Nonsense!" The doctor shrugged with

his old impatience. "Never felt better." Yet the hand that fumbled with the fastenings of his overcoat shook as it had not done six months before.

Mr. Proctor poked at the fire. "I could n't learn anything definite. Your sign gave me a bad half hour."

The doctor frowned. "But I could n't do anything else," he protested. "I could n't let the child die."

The doctor's tone brought the young man to his side. "You think that Katherine is going to be ill," he asserted.

"I tell you I could n't do otherwise." The doctor drew his coat about him and shivered, though the stove in front of him already vibrated with heat.

"Whatever comes — Katherine's mother would have had me do the same thing. And after all, scarlet fever — But one's own flesh and blood — We 're all cowards."

"Send to Brownsville. I 'll start now. I can have another physician here by to-morrow noon."

"To have him find an impertinent young woman who refuses to go to bed?" The doctor shook his shoulders, as if to free himself. "No, I 've infected you with my own senseless nerves. The child 's hardly sick yet, but I know the symptoms. Let 's drop the thought of it. I came down here to regain my point of view."

"The quarantine" — The young man stopped, and beat a tattoo on his chair. "I am coming to your house from now on, Dr. Edmister."

The doctor rose, his hat in hand. "You are not coming to my house until I give you permission."

"But you will give me permission when you understand."

"I will never give you permission so long as there is danger of contagion, and if you attempt to come I will oppose you by force. I told you once what an epidemic means in a place like this. I am talking violently, for a great deal is at stake."

"Because for me everything is at stake" —

The doctor did not seem to hear him. "I shall send you word whenever I can," he interrupted. "Wait! We 'll contrive a post office. There is a hollow pine at the top of the trail."

"I will be there twice a day."

Dr. Edmister studied the rubbed carpet. "I have missed you, Proctor. Have you any message for Katherine? She asked to be remembered to you, by the way."

The young man bowed. "Only my warm regards. My message I will bring in person — when I come."

"You 're coming!"

"So long as the news is favorable — no. But otherwise — it will take more than force to stop me."

The doctor's look softened. "I will leave the messages. Good-by."

The young man wakened as the doctor walked away. He realized, suddenly, how fragmentary

their talk had been; how little interest he had shown in the doctor's greeting. A pang of belated hospitality dulled, for a moment, the ache of anxiety that he felt had been his companion for years, instead of for an hour. Well, there would come a day when Dr. Edmister would understand.

"There would come a day." Mr. Proctor walked the floor with impatience that the day must be again delayed. He was glad to see Cole approaching. Cole stood for action, — action that was to undo the false beginning of the previous year.

As usual, Cole's pauses told more than his reticent speech. He was glad that Mr. Proctor was back; it had been a strange winter — little snow and unseasonable heat. Logging had been difficult for six weeks, and the men had had too much leisure. It would be all right now that the mill was to open.

Cole made his adieus, then came back with a postscript. He delivered it with unmistakable reluctance.

"What do you think about employing Yngve Torstenson again?"

"Has Yngve been in mischief?"

"He likes to talk." Cole gave his unwilling smile. "He 's taking elocution lessons from Dr. Griggs."

In spite of his anxiety Mr. Proctor laughed. "Then employ him by all means. He will serve as barometer and messenger boy."

CHAPTER XIX

AN IMPULSE?

THERE was a note in the hollow tree the next morning. "Katherine is ill," it read, "but I think that the case promises to be a light one. Minnie Torkildson is out of danger."

Mr. Proctor put the paper in his pocket, with no change of look. The suggestion that the case would be a light one meant nothing. He was familiar with the doctor's unfailing optimism.

As he went through the village he stopped, with the sudden realization that there was no one but Olive Cole with whom he could share his anxiety. His mouth grew hard; he was beginning to understand the loneliness in Katherine's face that had troubled him in January. He studied the mean houses, the squalid street. Katherine had talked to him with tears of these people; had called them her friends; had said that they loved her father. They were proving that she was wrong. The glow of reforming zeal with which he had looked forward to the year's work gave way to sick distaste. He had thought to begin the season with a talk to the men; he was in no mood for it now. He welcomed the work that lay before him, but he knew that he would do it stolidly. The

best of his thought was tarrying on the doctor's bluff.

Summer arrived, in defiance of the calendar, in the coming days; the air was close and steaming. People did not wonder that Mr. Proctor looked fagged. He was working late in his office, and walked a great deal. It was supposed that he was examining the timber.

The bulletins at the hollow tree were monotonously guarded. "As well as can be expected" was the favorite phrase. Mr. Proctor shared his news with no one; the forest was his confidant.

But the forest walks held compensations. What matter that spring were early — the birds and the flowers were awaiting it. Even in the dimness of woodland paths, where the snow yet lingered, the arbutus dragged its rough leaves to the warmth, and burst into pink-flushing beauty. Its haunting fragrance was the breath of coming summer, and the dreams that it brought wove magic from the lengthening sunbeams. The birches on the headland looked out from veils of misty gray that heralded their robes of green. On all sides was the divine unrest of birth. Old as the resurrection miracle it might be, but it waked the man who watched upon the doctor's trail to a new knowledge of himself and life.

He walked up the trail one day, to find Louis Detiere before him. The Belgian was sitting on a log near the hollow tree, and his look estimated Mr. Proctor less as a man than a possible source of news.

"The doctor, or his girl?" Detiere pointed to the scarlet-fever sign.

"It is Miss Edmister."

"Good!" The man stroked the column of his bared neck with approval. "The doctor, he has lost his nerve, and would die, but she will get well — the girl will."

"How do you know she will get well?" Mr. Proctor had been waiting for three weeks for this assurance; he could not ignore it, whatever its foundation.

"How do I know that she get well?" The Belgian rose, and stretched his superbly muscled arms above his head. "See me!" he said arrogantly. "Would not I get well? She is like me — that girl. She will want to get well, and she will get well. She has grit, and gets what she wants. The fever — pouf!" he tossed the thought of it from off his finger tips. "But the doctor is old, and give up."

"What do you mean?"

Detiere stopped to call down furies of unmentionable size and name upon the village. "The people kill the doctor," he said. "All winter no one came to him. They go to Dr. Griggs."

"But the men were in the camps."

"Not all. No, it was Dr. Griggs, and the doctor he know it and get old. When the people see him, they go away because they are ashamed."

"Why do you admire Dr. Edmister so much, Detiere?" Mr. Proctor had walked with the Belgian to the foot of the trail. The message could wait until he was alone.

Detiere laughed till the woods echoed. "Why do I like Dr. Edmister? Why do I like you?" His look patronized even as it commended. "I can do things. See!" He tossed his open knife at a distant pine, and the blade stuck quivering in a knot that showed itself as target. "I can boss people, and I choked a wolf with my own hands. I like strong men. The people is sheep. They like Dr. Griggs."

The talk with Detiere proved the turning-point. "Better" ran the messages, and "Still better," till there came a day when "Out of danger" looked up at Mr. Proctor. The words blurred; he read them several times, as if to get their meaning. He was a long time going down the trail that day. A robin was singing, and he found a cluster of bloodroot in a sheltered hollow. It would be weeks before Katherine could run down the path with her old dancing step, but if he could help her — He picked a stone from the way, and trimmed some intrusive branches, while the robin mocked him for his pains.

As he reached the village, he saw the smoke of a departing steamer. He hastened his step. There should be a package of books for him in this mail. Perhaps Katherine could read soon. At all events, he would send her the books, and she could exult in the uncut leaves.

He saw Jessie at his side door, and made a detour to greet her. She should share in this overflowing of good-will.

"Any mail?" he shouted. "I expected a package."

Jessie lifted an expressive face. "It came," she said. "It 's hanging up its things in the side bedroom."

Mr. Proctor walked to the door of the side bedroom.

"Well, Philip!"

"Hello, old chap!" The young man turned his winning smile. "You did n't get my letter?"

"Naturally not. Why did you come?"

"Commend me to my guardian for a welcome! How is she, Robert?"

"Miss Edmister?"

"Yes."

"Did you come these thousand miles to ask that question?"

"I 've asked it now, anyway, and I 'd like an answer. Confound you, Robert, if you 've bad news, tell it!"

"I beg your pardon, Philip. She 's better. Out of danger."

"Good for Lady Patricia!" The lad whistled his relief. "I 'm awfully glad to hear it."

"You understand it will be some time before you can see her?"

"Oh, that 's all right!" Philip laughed easily. "See here, Bob, don't take this so seriously. I told you I was coming up some time this summer, and I thought I 'd come now, and get the early fishing. If it is n't convenient, though" —

"It 's always convenient." Mr. Proctor threw an arm over his cousin's shoulder. "It 's been convenient ever since you were in kilts, you repro-

bate, and you know it. I 'm getting the manners of Wilsonport."

" You 're awfully good to me. I 'll be square with you, Robert. You 've been brother and cousin and guardian together. I did come to see that girl, in a way. It was just because you wrote that she was ill. I could n't get her out of my head after that. It seemed so forlorn to think of her on that hill, with no one to care what became of her. And I was coming later, anyway."

Mr. Proctor smiled, — a rather tired smile, that came often to replace the half-cynical lightness of the year before.

" I believe you 're rather a credit to your guardian, after all. Well, come to supper."

A week later Philip appeared in his cousin's office door.

" Dr. Edmister 's coming," he announced. " If that means that Lady Patricia 's receiving, say a good word for me."

Dr. Edmister held Mr. Proctor's hand a long time.

" I 'll have another patient," he said. " You 're overworking."

" My hardest work has been to keep my promise to you."

" I 've seen you on the trail. Well, — it 's over. Come up to-morrow. We 'll be fumigated by that time. What have you been doing, Proctor ? "

" Climbing your trail. I 'll climb it with a happier heart now."

The doctor drew a chair to the window. " How

blue the water is!" he said irrelevantly. "It 's a glad world."

"It 's a glad world for me — but it has n't been. May I talk seriously for a few moments, doctor?"

The doctor buttoned his coat. "Now I wonder if you 're going to ask me about last winter!" he protested. "I thought I had something — an anxiety — to share with my friend, but I find that I 've not. Since Katherine is herself again I learn that I love this country, and am happy in it. It 's a mysterious land, wild and austere, and the people are like the country. But they are my people. Their hearts are right, and they are worth being patient with when they make mistakes. So what more is there to say? Don't misunderstand me, Proctor. I would come to you first if I were in perplexity."

"I think that I understand."

"Yes, I think that you do. But I 've another explanation, that 's not so easy. I must make it before you see Katherine. I hope that you will be able to understand my motive. I have told my daughter nothing of your kindness in these last weeks — God knows that I feel it myself — beyond the fact that you inquired occasionally. The flowers I have carried to her room — but have said nothing. Can you understand?"

"Why should you — They were trifling courtesies."

"They were far from trifling courtesies to me," —the doctor avoided his friend's eyes, — "but they

meant little to you, in a way, and that is what Katherine would not understand. She would exaggerate. You can hardly grasp the limitations of the life that she has lived. What would be the courteous phrase of friendship — of acquaintance, even — in the life that we have known would be demonstrative to her. She is a grateful child, and rather hungry for liking — or so I have thought lately. It is difficult not to say more than I mean. This small concealment has been for your sake as well as for hers."

Mr. Proctor lifted his head. The pallor of the winter had not left his face, and he looked white enough to make the doctor pause. "But suppose that I wish her to exaggerate? I have tried to tell you this before. What would you say then?"

The doctor did not reply for a moment. He walked the room. "I should say," he said at length, "that I was confused — that I would ask you to wait — that this was an impulse." He came back and held out his hand, looking at it with scorn when he saw that it trembled. "You know how I feel about you, Proctor. But — I 'm not prepared for this. Suppose that we forget it for a time. We 're all overstrained, and — then the weather. Did you ever see such heat at this time of year? The roads are dusty now."

Mr. Proctor had regained his speech and his color. "My impulse, as you call it, does n't depend on the state of the roads." He looked at the older man with a determined smile. "If you say wait,

I will wait — for a time. I have waited now longer than you would suspect."

The doctor studied the young man. "Well, come up to-morrow. And bring your cousin, if he'd like to come."

CHAPTER XX

THE MASK OF DUTY

The cousins found Katherine on the veranda the next day. She was throned in an armchair, and was obviously sovereign of the occasion. Dr. Edmister wore, even from the distance, the air of a satellite, and Mr. Proctor's breath halted as he realized again how ill the girl must have been to justify such an attitude in her father — the father who, with all his easy catholicity, maintained, even with his daughter, the distinction of an unapproachable reserve.

It was a wasted Katherine who greeted the young men, but one whose face was aflame with renewed interest in life. Her eyes defied the memory of illness, and exulted in the wonder of living. The happiness in her face as she welcomed her friends was as impersonal as the caress of the wandering breeze; she welcomed them as she welcomed the sunshine.

Mr. Proctor watched her in what he felt was inexcusable silence. Yet no rage at his dumbness could find him words. The memory of his vigils in the forest made paltry the usual phrases, and those were all that he had opportunity to use. Philip swept the conversation with him, and Dr. Edmister sat by and used observant eyes.

But Mr. Proctor claimed something for himself as he was leaving.

"May I come to-morrow — alone?" he asked.

As Katherine looked at him in answer, he realized how her manner had changed even since January; how steady and controlled it had become.

"Yes, come," she said.

But with the to-morrow, Katherine looked tired. The radiant courage in her eyes persisted, but her face showed lines.

"Don't stay long, Proctor," Dr. Edmister warned, "and don't talk of anything more serious than the weather — that 's serious enough to be uncomfortable. Is n't it warm!"

And so it was not until the end of his brief call that Mr. Proctor touched upon anything that he really wished to say.

"I 've a great many questions — but your father asked me not to stray from the barometer. You 'll have to talk to me a day at a time when you 're stronger. You remember you promised."

Katherine laced her thin fingers together, and studied the water through the oblong openings that she made.

"I do remember. I 'm glad to remember. But I don't want to talk about anything in Wilsonport — now. It 's cowardly to turn my back on what has to be faced eventually, but — I 'd like to have a playtime while Mr. Cabell is here; just as we had in January. There will be time to be serious when we are alone again. I 've almost forgotten how to play."

"Miss Katherine, you treat me as if I were a walking homily! I have been known to jest — upon compulsion."

Katherine dropped her hands, and her mouth looked suddenly troubled. "But not lately," she said. "You jested all the time when you first came — and at everything. You don't now. I don't think you know how you have changed. Wilsonport, and everything in it, means care and gravity to you. You must have dreaded to come back."

"Wilsonport means everything that is nearest my heart, — the home that I dream of making, the — This is not what I promised your father. Well, we 'll agree to play. Philip is my lord paramount of the art."

Yes, Katherine looked white and tired. "But you 'll play too?" she asked.

"Yes, I 'll play too."

But he did not. His business pressed savagely. The men were not working as they should, and accomplishment lagged. A feeling of tension showed even in Cole's face.

"The men are so sulky I 'm afraid to push them," he confessed. "Perhaps it will be better when this hot spell 's over."

But work could not have detained Mr. Proctor had there been holiday time in his spirit. There was not. Philip came and went in the doctor's household, with a happy assurance of welcome that made it impossible for the somewhat perturbed host to say him nay, and the lad frolicked with

Katherine through the sunshine hours with an abandon that Mr. Proctor could not share. The man acknowledged that he must seem stiff and unadaptable, but he had reached a point where his tongue betrayed him. He could not be in the near presence of this girl without showing somewhat of his mind. It would be unkind to trouble her — yet. And so he stayed away. Philip would be leaving soon, and the summer would be long and gracious in its opportunity.

But Philip did not go, and the days sped. Mr. Proctor spoke at last.

"They 're writing me from home, and I 'm at the end of my excuses. I think you 'll have to leave on the next steamer."

Philip chewed his lip, and walked a few paces. "It 's that office, I suppose. I think I 'll stay another month, and take the chances."

Mr. Proctor laid down his papers. "You 'll lose the chances, you mean. If they 'll take you in the office after your procrastination, you go. You must take this steamer."

"I must?"

"I happen to be guardian, farce that it is, and you 're several months short of your majority, my boy. Be reasonable. You 've had a long holiday. Why not go?"

"I 'm not ready."

"Philip! Philip! Life is n't play."

The boy squared his shoulders. "No, life is n't play, I suppose, nor love, nor happiness, nor anything else but grind. Oh, I did n't mean to say

that, old chap! But you 've been so queer lately, and I don't like to be pushed off this way. Furthermore, I don't intend to go. I 'm not going till I 've had an answer from Katherine Edmister."

"An answer from Miss Edmister!"

"Miss Katherine to every one else, Miss Edmister to me! She does n't need help in hedging her dignity."

"But, Philip! Have you spoken to her father?"

"No. Yes, yes, I will. I 'm speaking to you first. But you see that I can't go away."

"I see that you can go on Saturday's steamer."

"And if I refuse?"

Mr. Proctor walked the room. "Philip," — he laid a hand upon his cousin's shoulder, — "we 're saying what we 'll regret. We 've lost our balance. But you must go away. This won't last. It has n't root enough. You must go away."

"I am in earnest, Robert. No one but myself can tell whether it has root enough. And after all — why not?"

"You are too young. You must wait."

"Wait till another man wins her? And she 's young, too. And I 've hoped lately — Oh, well, I 've got to face it, whichever way it goes. Why do you disapprove?"

Mr. Proctor did not answer for a time. He stopped walking, and sat at his desk. "I have no reason to disapprove," he said, with mechanical quiet. "You have a right to your chance as well as the next man. I suppose, as you say, it is suit-

able. You are both young, and — I had n't thought of it. But I must ask you to go Saturday, if possible. There is double reason for it now. You need the position."

"Yes, I suppose that I do. All right, I 'll go Saturday. I 'm glad to have had this talk, Bob. I have n't liked the distance between us."

Mr. Proctor passed his hands over his face, as if to smooth the lines that he knew were hardening. "The distance has been my selfishness," he said slowly. "You 'll come to me, Philip, when you have something to tell?"

Philip nodded soberly. "I 'll come to you."

But Saturday came without bringing further confidences. The cousins sat together on a pile of bark, and waited for the steamer.

"I promised to tell you," Philip said after long study of the horizon, "but I 've nothing to tell. I could n't do it. I 'll write — then she can't change the subject."

"If she has tried to change the subject" —

"I don't know that she has. I don't know that she 's thought about it, either way. I never could get her to be serious. Oh, she 's been Lady Patricia all right enough — pleasant, but miles away. I thought that when I said good-by — but it was the same story."

A scroll of smoke grew distinct on the horizon, and the men rose.

"There 's the steamer, Robert." Philip held out his hand. "Wish me luck. You have n't done that, and I 'd like to hear you say it."

Mr. Proctor took the hand and held it for a moment. "What a boy it is, after all," he said. "Where 's your bag?"

"Katherine likes you," — Philip used the name boldly, as if its sound gave him courage, — "and what you say counts with her always. Do your best for me. Promise to do that."

The man looked at the lad whom he loved. "Don't send another to do your wooing," he cried. "You 're leaving me alone with your Priscilla. Don't ask me to promise anything. Leave my hands free."

Philip's flush paled swiftly. "I beg your pardon — I had never thought of this," he stumbled, as if thinking slowly. Then his color returned, burning and angry. "So this is why you hurried me away!"

Mr. Proctor met his gaze quietly. "Be just, Philip. I gave you your opportunity. I am claiming mine."

"Then it 's all over with me." Philip dropped his bag, and his breath was almost a groan. "You can't mean it, Robert! You 're not serious!"

"I am very serious. I do you the justice to think you the same. Now it rests with her to choose."

Philip pressed his hands together. The steamer was rocking against the pier. "To choose! Precious little choice about it when you 're alone with her all summer. And you hurried me away. It was n't fair, Bob, it was n't fair! And if I could stay a week longer I think — Promise not to say anything to her this summer."

"Now it is you who are not fair. It 's a sorry snarl, Philip, but let us stand up to it without whining."

"I 'm not whining. I 'm asking for my rights. It was n't square to try to pack me off this way without giving me a hint. I can get a vacation in October. Promise not to say anything till I come back then. That will give us both a fair field. Promise me that, Bob!"

"I can't, Philip." Mr. Proctor's face was gray. "That is a promise no man has a right to exact."

"But I ask you for it."

"You won't when you're cooler, my boy. There, you must go. If it were anything else in the whole world — But — I can't. Good-by."

A moment later Philip appeared at the stern of the boat. A wake of churning water foamed between his cousin and himself, but he called across it.

"I do ask for your promise, Robert. Remember that you sent me away."

Mr. Proctor shook his head, but his step lagged. The struggle had cost him dear.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PROMISE

THE next morning gave hope of rain; cloud-streamers banded the sky, and the horizon line showed gray-white and threatening. It had been pitilessly clear for weeks, and now, from mill to lighthouse, courage rose with the sinking mercury. A rain might yet save the crops.

Mr. Proctor spent the day in his office, but though his papers claimed him, his glance haunted the barometer. The air was breathlessly still, and clouds were gathering. A drought was the frequent forerunner of a tempest. He knew the potentialities of the lake in a storm — and he knew that he had sent Philip away.

Late in the afternoon Dr. Edmister came to the office. "Where have you been of late?" he chided. "It 's to your undoing, wherever it is. You 're looking wretchedly. What are you taking to heart — your mill, or the weather?"

"The weather. You suggested, you remember, that my emotions hung on the barometer."

The doctor attempted to look grave, and failed. "Don't scoff at the barometer. It rules emotion more than young heads like yours admit. Well, we 're going to have rain at last."

Proctor's anxious look returned. "I 'm afraid this is n't rain. I hope that you can be at home to-night, for it acts like wind. It 's going to be a tempest, or the mercury 's a liar."

The mercury proved true. The wind came at sunset out of a sable sky. A white furrow cut the oily stillness of the lake, and with a sibilant scream the storm leaped to the land. Mr. Proctor watched it from the window, and his face was grim. That the house he stood in crouched shivering in the gale, did not concern him.

He watched the storm for hours. It was battle royal that the wind had with earth, and the chances seemed in favor of the gale. The lightning, lacing the low scudding clouds, showed the lake black and struggling. Philip was somewhere in that chaos, and he, his guardian, had sent him.

He walked the floor, and strove for reason. This thought that jumped at his throat, this sense of accountability for Philip, might be morbid, but it would not away. It was useless to tell himself that he had done what seemed duty, that no man could be, or should wish to be, his brother's keeper; all excuses read as sophistry in the face of two statements. He had pushed Philip into this danger. He had done it because Philip blocked his way. The man put it to himself thus badly, though conscious, even as he did so, that it was but half the truth. The truth was deeper, tenderer, harder to find. Faced with his own soul, Mr. Proctor knew that he had tried, gropingly, but with mouth set hard, to hold himself to what seemed best for all of them. But Philip could not know this.

It was not a night for sleep. The rain was shredded into mist by the wind, and the air was sulphurous and dust-laden; the sob of the lake could be heard above the storm. It was possible that the Buffalo steamer had found port, but the possibility looked more remote with every hour.

"I do ask for your promise, Robert. Remember that you sent me away." The words echoed. What had then sounded like ruthless egotism, seemed now a legitimate appeal. Mr. Proctor lived his life again, and reviewed his obligations. Where, he asked himself at last, should Philip turn for support, if not to the man who had stood to him for brother?

But it was not his struggle with the balance-sheet of his conscience that made Mr. Proctor most wakeful; it was the thought of Philip's danger. The elemental temptation assailed the man to bargain with Fate; to say, "Spare Philip, and I will give my own happiness as ransom." Yet even as the thought came, he put it by. His was not a God of barter.

The night and the next day passed. Then word came. "The steamer Undine of the Buffalo line lay at Cedar Harbor during the storm."

Mr. Proctor read the message, and walked to the door. It was a dreary world. The air was sultry, and wreckage littered the sand. But the very austerity of life supplied the iron for the man's resolve. He would make the promise now, freely, and under no compulsion. The trust that Philip had tried to thrust upon him, he would accept. He

would step aside, and hold an even step till Philip could return.

And with this promise in his heart, he was free to go once more to the house upon the bluff. He had withdrawn thought and glance from there for a day, and he starved for a word.

As he climbed the trail, he heard Chevalier's plaintive staccato. His step hastened. Whatever his promise, he could at least see Katherine. But Katherine was not in sight, and a bend in the trail showed Chevalier scratching at the foot of a large pine.

"Hold him, old fellow!" Mr. Proctor pushed by the dog, and peered upward. The game was easily found; it was curled in a blue ball on a stout branch, and its eyes were wrathful.

Mr. Proctor recoiled, as if he were the detected one. "Are you hurt?" he called sharply.

"Not seriously," came the response, after a pause. "I should n't be ten feet above the ground if I were permanently disabled." The voice matched the eyes.

The man forgot everything but his joy in the tone; this was the happy, brier-set Katherine of an earlier day.

"I 'll wait for you here." He selected a log with some ostentation. "When you 're tired of playing dryad, I 'll help you down."

"Will you?" A small laugh answered him. "Turn your back for a minute, and you 'll see."

There was a stir in the pine needles, and the girl stood before him. Her cheeks were pink, and

her eyes embarrassed, but there was welcome in her face, — welcome that hastened the man in confusion to declare his message.

"I 've good news for you, Miss Katherine. The Undine is safe. I 've just heard."

"That is good news. I 've been anxious." And that, with the breath of a sigh, was all. The day had passed when Katherine's mind was his for the reading.

"Mr. Proctor," she said, as they walked on, "you said that you would talk with me sometime. Is to-day sometime?"

"All days are 'sometime' if you will talk with me."

Katherine stopped. Her hair, cut during her illness, framed the eager face that she lifted to him in scrolls of reddish gold. "Have you time? How much of that speech is of the world, and how much is of Wilsonport? I did n't mean to say that. For you 'll think that I don't appreciate your interest in anything that concerns father. And I do. Indeed I do. Shall we take this path? If we go to the house now, we 'll meet the men."

"What men?"

"I heard Louis Detiere coming with some of his men, and" —

"And you climbed the tree. Miss Katherine, you must n't come down here alone!"

Katherine's chin lifted. "You don't understand. That 's part of what I want to tell you. I was n't afraid of the men, but it was pleasanter not to be seen."

"But Chevalier! If the men had been a minute later he would have called them to the tree. Don't do it again! And don't come down the trail alone! Promise me that."

"May I eat and sleep? The trail 's as necessary to me. Chevalier was there all the time. He lay like a stone till the men passed."

"But I heard him barking before I reached you."

Sudden contempt threaded the girl's speech with laughter. "He saw you first — else he would n't have barked. Chevalier has never been properly acclimated in Wilsonport. He does make — distinctions."

There was flattery in the pause before the last word, and a flying dimple led the way to forgetfulness, but Mr. Proctor kept his eyes down. His thought was sombre. What had looked like the path of duty, arid but well marked and clear to follow, now showed tortuous windings. Every word told him that his tongue was not his servant when he was with Katherine. And if he took this comradeship that she was proffering, could he hold his share of it within the bounds of his control? The debatable land where friendship joins love has not been mapped. He had promised not to cross the line. He would not cheat himself with phrases. Yet if he could help her —

Katherine stopped at a flower-fringed log. "Let us sit down," she said more soberly. If she felt rebuff in his manner, she hid her discomfiture in dignity that became her well. "And now to go

back to last winter. You knew then that something was wrong."

"But about Detiere first! This farce of his needing a doctor has gone far enough."

"It's a farce, but a kindly one." Katherine crossed her hands to hold them steady, and her face lost its glow. "Now to begin at the beginning" —

"I know the beginning. It's about Dr. Griggs. I can spare you that."

Katherine rested her chin in her hand, and looked at him gravely. "Why try to spare me? Our evasions can't alter the fact. No, I'd rather put the situation in words, even though I know that you must understand part of it already. The people have deserted father for Dr. Griggs. The feeling began before the mill closed last year, and grew through the winter. We've lived alone for months."

"It's unbelievable. I" —

Her hand checked him. "The worst is over, and — never mind. But that's what brings Mr. Detiere. He not only comes himself; he brings his men. They're all uncompromisingly well, and father frowns and sends them away. It's absurd, but it's an effort at loyalty. Do you wonder that I called it a kindly farce?"

It was the man who hunted for words. Her composure hurt him. What had not this vivid girl endured that the months should have taught her tongue control!

"In January," she went on, "I was bewildered,

unhappy. I did n't know what it all meant. I had thought that the people loved my father. I had been proud of their love for him. It — it choked me sometimes just to think that I was his daughter. And they do love him. They do. I can see how it all happened. I 've had a great deal of time to think. For one thing, father kept me away from the village on — on just a little different plane, and the people resented it. They did n't feel that he was one of them — but he was. Indeed he was. He did it all for me. If I could only have understood this earlier. And so when Dr. Griggs came and lived among them, and had temperance meetings, they — well, that 's the story."

"That 's not all the story. The story is the ingratitude of the matter — the injustice. Your father had been as watchful, as tender, as Providence itself."

The girl looked troubled. "I wish that you would n't think of it in that way. I don't — not now. I — I don't know how to say this." Her voice halted with sudden timidity. "But have we any right to act as Providence for others? Think of the mischief that I 've made! Not about your mill alone — Oh, please don't speak of that! — but about Adrien. I was sure that I knew best as to what he should do, and I 've made such a tangle for everybody. Not that father would do anything like that, and father does know what is best, but he could n't help trying to hold the people to standards that they did n't understand. I hope that this does n't sound as if I were criticising

father. But I 'm able to see now that I must n't call the people ungrateful. Father does n't."

"You 've talked with your father about it?"

"Only once. I wanted him to go away. Can you talk to him about it, Mr. Proctor? You can influence him. That is why I am telling you the whole story."

"He does n't wish to go?"

"He was ready to go last winter, but now — He 's never talked with me but once, but he told me — I hope that he would n't mind my telling you this — he told me that he was not willing to leave the people with only Dr. Griggs for a physician. He has found that Dr. Griggs is not competent. He — You know, Mr. Proctor, that he would n't say that to any one but me?"

"I know."

"And now I am telling you. But I know that you care for father."

"Yes, I care for your father."

"And he must go away; he must go. I can't say anything more. If I try, he laughs and talks of the economic conditions in Corea. But he must go away. He is not well. Will you talk to him about it?"

Mr. Proctor pulled the bark from the log beside him, and a straggling line of ants skurried over his marauding fingers.

"There!" he said. "That comes of interference. It 's just what you were saying. Why could n't I have spared their roof!"

"You 'd rather not speak to father?"

He looked down into her eyes. She held them wide for him for a fleeting second.

"Dare I take the responsibility?" he asked very slowly. "I don't know. I 'm not as ready to answer such a question as I would have been a year ago. It was you who taught me to pause — who changed my standpoint."

The girl did not seem to hear his last words. Her face looked pinched.

"I am worried about father," she said almost mechanically. "And you won't help me?"

He stretched out a hand. "Is that fair? Do you think it 's easy for me to sit here and refuse? But — I have learned. There would come a day when — you would not respect me if I urged your father to leave now. He can't desert, and leave the people in Dr. Griggs's hands. It is you who taught me to understand that."

She rose and stood before him with her hands pressed together. "Men are so strong, so sure that they are right! For even father does n't care if it hurts me. You pick out a goal, then ride roughshod. I — I don't care for the people," — her careful tones broke, — "I am worried about father." She walked away; then came swiftly back. "I 'm wrong," she said, with a catch in her voice that hung between sobs and laughter. "I 'm wrong, and you 're right. But — let 's change the subject."

"Not before you let me say" —

"Please — please!" she interrupted. She sat beside him again, and ventured the tip of a finger

on his outstretched hand. "Please, not a word! For you 're right. And I must learn to be worthy of father. You 're working very hard. Your face shows it. Perhaps it 's this weather. Will the work be easier in time?"

"What — what makes me look tired may grow easier — in time. When is Adrien coming home? I 'm thinking of taking him into the office this summer. He will need work, and his brains should serve me better than his fingers. Is he happier than he was at first?"

"I don't know. I don't hear from Adrien."

"I will ask his father about him." Mr. Proctor looked away at the treetops, and hunted for another conversational bridge to safe territory; his pulse was beating hard from the last struggle. Then an intimation of what Katherine's words might mean came over him, and prudence yielded the right of way. "Miss Katherine, has anything happened — anything unpleasant? You say that Adrien does n't write. Have Ferdinante and Livingstone been meddling? If they have" —

"But they have n't." A sunbeam dropped through the leaves to show the girl's eyes wet, though her mouth was smiling. "You can lower your lance. There 's no battle for you there, Sir Knight."

The man would not smile. "I am permitted to fight only your father's battles?"

"But the battle is over. I would like to explain. You remember that Ferdinante would n't speak to me? She came to me in the winter after

you went away. It was nearly dark, a cold, snowy night, and she stood outside my window. You can hardly imagine how lonely these woods can look in a winter twilight. She had been crying; Adrien had not written. And she talked to me. She had never done that before, and she taught me a great many things. I had been very selfish; I had taken everything that came to me as a matter of course, and never thought whom I might be robbing. She felt that I had made Adrien discontented, and that I had even taken Karen's friendship from her. She did not understand — about Karen. But she has had very little from life, and it seemed to her that I had had everything. So I told her, at last, that I would n't write to Adrien any more."

"But there are two sides. Don't you owe Adrien consideration?"

She looked grave. "I tried to think that out. But in the end the matter seemed to rest between Ferdinante and me. I could n't do anything else. Ferdinante has been lonely all her life. I've learned this winter what it means to be lonely."

"And you have been alone all these winter months! Why did I take you at your word in January! I should have stayed in spite of you. Even one friend — and you let me call myself that — would have helped."

"No, no! It would have been madness for you to come back." Her tone gave combat, even though the possibility was past. "It would have put you in the wrong with your men if you had tried to fight our battles. Then you have work to

do out in the world. All this will pass. And I 'm not lonely now."

He looked at her. No, she was not lonely. Her eyes were merry and wholly fearless. And as he searched her yet again, he saw that this was not the girl whose tears had haunted him since January. There had been a moment then when his hand might have helped her; now she held her footing bravely. The gentle philosophy of the father had become courage in the daughter.

He left her at her father's gate, with the conviction that the moment that might have been his he had let slip by; but even as he turned, her voice stopped him.

"Mr. Proctor," — the name wavered, — "I was unjust to you long ago. Have you forgiven it? I 've often" —

She was at his side, and his breath came hard. He had said good-by to a serene-eyed woman; here stood the impetuous child of his memory. What alchemy wrought this?

"But the men don't understand you yet," she dashed on. "They think" — a frown of embarrassment corrected her blush — "they think — as I did. I know now that I was wrong. It 's a strange summer. No one can tell what it may bring. Have you forgiven me?"

Her face, wistful, challenging, looked to him for answer; its very trustfulness robbed him yet again of words. He took her hand, and raised it to his lips. "To thank you," he gravely said; his air made the observance dignified and fitting.

"You were not wrong. I was — Yes, let me say it! Well, never mind. It is a strange summer. Whatever it brings, you 've — I hope that it may bring you happiness, Miss Katherine."

CHAPTER XXII

ON THE LIGHTHOUSE TRAIL

KATHERINE'S remark that it was a strange summer was the echo of what was on every tongue. For July, that only the year before had dowered the passing summer with a coronal of beauty, came now with heat that baked the ground. The showers that fell occasionally, to save the earth from madness, were too brief to make impression on the highways, and dust hung like smoke above the forest. Near the settlements the earth was tinder, and even the morasses of the tamarack swamps showed spots of powdered soil.

Life drooped under the heat. The sun brought no healthful languor in its shining; it carried fever and unrest. Mr. Proctor, forcing his way doggedly through the barrier of days that separated him from October and Philip's return, felt, as he watched his men, that this was not the time for him to try to reach them by speech or deed. If he could ignore their sullen impertinences a few weeks longer, the weather must change. Then he could act. Now his own brain felt sluggish, inert. How must his men feel who lifted logs eleven hours a day?

For himself the hours were monotonously toil-

some. He went little to the house on the bluff, for he hated his half measures with Katherine. He could not be friend, and he must not be lover; the compromise that had served him at their last meeting seemed mean in his own eyes.

But the doctor came to him. After one suggestion that Mr. Proctor's visits were welcome at all times, Dr. Edmister accepted the situation in silence that showed that he was drawing deductions of his own. Yet never had he seemed to find Mr. Proctor's friendship more essential.

"Have you seen Adrien Lauzeone since his return?" he asked one day.

Mr. Proctor laughed. "Yes."

The doctor looked annoyed. "It 's hardly a laughing matter, Proctor. The boy 's a travesty. He 's talking communism in the same breath with aristocracy of intellect. His self-love must have been cruelly torn at Madison to send him on this tangent. He 's adopted the oldest clothes — yes, and the oldest manners. His vocabulary with the men is fairly primeval."

"I should explain my laugh; it was more at myself than at Adrien. I offered to take him into the office, and he gave me a comprehensive statement of what he thought of any one who would enter my service."

"What does it all mean, Proctor?"

Proctor hesitated. "He gave a variety of reasons, — economic and — feminine."

Dr. Edmister frowned, then smiled as suddenly. "I heard something of that the other day. I

should have been as well pleased if you had n't stumbled on it."

"I did n't stumble. I stood — and took it as a broadside. I wonder just what you heard, if you are willing to tell me."

The doctor cleared his throat as if he disliked his task. "Oh, I heard what I suppose you call the feminine side. It was Yngve who was spokesman, — the men were in front of the store, — but Adrien prompted. He said — supply your own details, Proctor — that your attentions to Karen Torstenson had been somewhat pronounced; that you dropped" —

"The cub! To drag the girl in!" Mr. Proctor's eyes met the doctor's. The smile that grew between the men was grave, but full of confidence and understanding. "I suppose that I did make a mistake. I admired Miss Karen, and I did n't understand village conventions. It 's somewhat absurd, though, that Yngve did n't take the other side, and show me as a blighted being. This view may flatter my vanity, but it perplexes me — remembering the facts of the case."

"The facts of the case never concern Yngve. But this idea is too complex to be his; it must be Adrien's. It 's interesting to see" — the doctor gave himself over to philosophical enjoyment — "how that superstition persists, — the inherent wickedness of the men of the town; the primal integrity of the men of the country. It 's an article of faith. Adrien played a strong card, even if he had no facts."

"It moved the men?"

"Apparently. I hope this story won't reach Karen. Livingstone is growing too much of a mystic to be a very practical protection."

"Livingstone seems to intend to stay here this summer."

"Yes. I found him praying in the woods the other day. I did n't like his eyes. It will be visions next. He 'd better go back to organizing reform clubs. I wish that Livingstone were not just what he is. A little broader outlook, and he could accomplish the good that I 'm convinced he has at heart. It is a fair far country of piety and brotherhood that he has in mind. But he has lost his way. No matter if he has made mischief; his goal is to him a high conception."

"With Dr. Griggs as the flower of his conception," Mr. Proctor said testily. "My men are taking to letter-writing again, doctor. I found this notice on my door yesterday."

Dr. Edmister took the soiled paper gingerly. "It 's all so childish — and yet so tragic!" His voice had a tired fall that was new. "It 's nearly a year since Heinrich brought you the other paper, is n't it? At this rate they 're not of much importance."

"Their importance lies just in that. If they were not so scattering I could take action. Well, is it too warm for chess? I 'm in the humor for a game."

And this was as close to vital matters as their talk ever came. There was confidence between

them, but not expression. It was not alone that much that was in their minds was hard to bring to speech; there was another feeling — a sense of tension that Katherine had voiced when she said that no one could tell what the summer might bring. The impending weighed on tongue as well as spirit.

It was but little after daybreak the next morning when Mr. Proctor started for the lighthouse trail. He was going for the plunge which helped him through the day, when, at a bend of the path, he caught the gleam of a paper nailed to a hemlock. He walked over and tore it down with emphasis. It was more scurrilous than its predecessors, and for a moment his anger shook his poise. The position of the notice displayed a knowledge of his movements that was in itself an affront, for he told no one of his morning walk, and took it at an hour when the birds were scarce astir. He reread the blurred and ill-spelled lines, and his anger grew. The thought came that the wording was forced; that the errors were such as would suggest themselves by euphony to one trying to write incorrectly. If this were so, the writer was not far to find. His foot pressed the ground hard at the suggestion.

In his absorption he was slow in realizing that the ground under his right foot was curiously resistent. When he did, he stooped to investigate. He was standing on an iron belaying-pin of unusual size, and as he picked it up, fresh indignation colored his face. The pin was a relic of Heinrich's

sailor days, and belonged, as every child in the village knew, in the lightkeeper's mackinaw. It lay at the foot of the tree, as if it had been used in tacking the notice, and had been dropped and forgotten, but its position was ostentatiously careless. It courted inquiry, and was so palpably a ruse that Mr. Proctor wondered if after all these placards might be the work of childish hands. But the warning had been posted far above a child's grasp, and the venom of its wording was unmistakably mature.

He tore the paper, and sowed it on the lake, but the belaying-pin he replaced. At last he had, if not a clue, an opportunity to work toward one.

He left his house that evening as soon as he had finished supper, and sauntered through the village. He made an errand at the post office, and stopped to chat with Cole, whom he found standing in front. Ole Torstenson was smoking on the steps of the store, and, joining him, he questioned about the last order of supplies for the boarding-house; then he walked slowly to the other end of the village, and climbed the hill leading to the doctor's. All the village was astir in the long twilight, and he had been seen by fifty or more people. He stopped a few rods short of the end of the trail, and seating himself, waited for darkness. His destination was the lighthouse, but should he be seen his plan would go for naught.

No path followed the shore line back of the village, and Mr. Proctor climbed over brush and fallen timber till the half circle of the settlement

was passed, and he could venture into the open. The lighthouse trail, at the other horn of the crescent, he took boldly. He asked nothing better than to meet some one there, for Heinrich had no evening visitors, and a straggler upon that lonely way could have but one errand. But he reached the lighthouse, hearing nothing but his own footsteps and the hushed breathing of wild things that crept from his presence as he passed.

Heinrich met him with amazement and pleasure, but Bertha accepted his coming, as she accepted all good things, as hers by right, and did not trouble her enjoyment with question of his reasons. The room, exquisite in its cleanliness, looked radiant of home. Heinrich was mending a sail, Bertha knitting; and their faces showed peace that the tumultuous village did not share. The Bible, which was never far from Bertha's side, lay open on the kitchen table. The lame girl had yet to learn the meaning of loneliness.

Mr. Proctor seated himself with a sigh; he enjoyed the luxury of admitting that he was tired.

"I came for you to play for me," he said, and as Heinrich's violin whispered through the silence, the day's perplexities seemed of fading moment. The hour in the dim room was a gracious interlude.

The moon was low and the path black in shadow as he walked homeward; so black that it was unnecessary to conceal himself when he reached the hemlock tree. He found a log that offered dubious resting-place, and prepared to wait. If he

knew aught of human nature, the belaying-pin would bring at least one visitor before the night was over. He had thought that his ostentatious climb to the doctor's bluff would bring the visit early in the evening, but the hours passed, and with his thoughts for company, he watched the moon swing above the treetops.

It was difficult not to be introspective, alone with the night and the shadows, and after a losing struggle he abandoned himself to thoughts that during waking hours he fought away by labor. The procession of his days in Wilsonport walked before him, each with its memory. He had not stopped before to study the pattern of his life, and now he looked at its varying threads with care to weigh their values. He counted the year's gains and losses; its petty annoyances; its trivialities that were tragedies; yes, and its rewards — emphatically, its rewards.

And if, as he suspected, he were soon to meet Adrien, how should he deal with him? His pity for the lad had an undercurrent which Dr. Edmister had failed to understand. For with Adrien, the feminine side of Mr. Proctor's misdeeds had not concerned Karen alone. The wall which the lad had found between Katherine and himself was, he said without scruple, of Mr. Proctor's building. Here was cause for enmity which might lead to open action. Was Adrien to prove the burning-glass that should focus the prevailing discontent? But why should Adrien try to implicate Heinrich? Question for question!

And for Dr. Edmister — what? The thought was a knife for Mr. Proctor. Whatever crash was coming, he himself was prepared, but for the doctor — this man of indomitable quiet faith in human goodness — the way looked black.

And Katherine — He turned with sudden passion and gripped the log. The consciousness of this girl was always the background of his hours, but at this moment he could not hold her to the gray neutrality of his half thought. His fancy rioted, for a space, with a picture of what life would mean with her beside him, her love ready to meet his need through the long days. But even this vision had its sting. He had been sure of late that it would never be more than a vision. Since that last day when his talk with her had been largely blanks and dashes, he had had intuitive knowledge that each hour was pushing him further from her possible regard. How could she care for him? She had seen, first, a half-cynical critic who played and patronized, then a hard-working elderly man who talked in enigmas. He set his teeth at these pictures of himself; yet he felt them to be true.

And then came pictures of Katherine to tantalize him — random memories that pricked, yet drew him on. It was a momentous feeling that could so chain a man of his age, and he retraced its growth in himself almost with awe. He recalled the child who had piqued and amused him; then his fancy loitered with the Katherine of the January holiday — the half-awakened girl with her

moods of tears and laughter. The Katherine whom he knew now was none of these, but a woman, poised and sunny eyed. He had neglected his opportunities when he had let the child and girl slip by.

And what if Philip's interest in Katherine had been, after all, of the moment — regretted as his life flowed back in the channels that it had known? The question was best not asked. It was a relief that a faint sound from down the trail made him drop all thought, to listen.

Soon the sound became definite; steps were approaching. One person, or two? Two, it seemed at first; but the steps were cautious and there were no voices. The footfalls grew more distinct. Yes, there were two. This was unexpected, but Mr. Proctor tingled with anticipation. Let them come. He examined his muscles unconsciously; his fingers slipped away from them as if he had grasped steel.

A hoot-owl stirred sleepily, raised a wondering question of the night, and the steps halted. They were at the turn of the trail; but they waited — listening. There was a stout stick at Mr. Proctor's side. The symmetrical tapering of its knobby length recommended it to his critic's eye, and his hand weighed it with appreciation. The moon had found an opening in the trail's green canopy, so that hemlock and path were lighted, while the man waited in the shadow.

The steps came on again — but imagination had played tricks. There was but one person, after

all, and the figure that crept to the foot of the tree and dug in the earth at its base looked so small and unprotected that Mr. Proctor dropped his arm, with a gesture that was almost disappointment.

He waited till the belaying-pin, which he knew was the object of the search, was found, then sprung upon the groping figure, pinioning its arms.

"Well, Yngve," he said conversationally, "you 've kept me waiting some time. I 'll take this letter in person, if you please. So you 've been my correspondent. I 've done you an injustice. I had n't thought you capable of so sustained an effort."

The boy writhed with imprecations, but he could as well have beaten his strength against stone.

"Cultivate repose," the mocking voice went on. "You 'll find it useful socially — commend that precept to your friend Adrien. Your manner at this moment is too — galvanic."

The boy flung the belaying-pin backwards at his tormentor, but his arms were helpless, and the missile fell harmless to the ground.

"You hound!" the man dropped his mockery, and his voice was a lash, "pick that up again! That 's a little token that you 're to carry to Heinrich in person, and I 'll go with you to see that you do it gracefully. Pick it up, I say!"

He pushed the lad forward, and was bending with him, keeping a grasp upon the slender arms, when he heard a new sound behind him. His ear registered the warning more quickly than his

brain, but instinct taught him to dodge, and the blow that beat the sky to blood and the earth to nothingness lost half its force.

. . . . . .

He had watched a star for what seemed a long time. He tried to look away, and sleep again, but the star irritated with its persistent twinkle, and he cried querulously for some one to pull down the shades. His head ached, and he was cold; his bed, too, was hard, and as he tried to turn upon it his groping hand struck iron. The cold touch formed a link with memory. He kept his grasp upon the metal, struggling for mind and reason, and, little by little, he pieced fragmentary consciousness from out the chaos of his pain.

He had been struck on the head from behind — memory came in flashes, interspersed with intervals when he was dragged through space in the trail of a blazing star whose light seared his aching eyes until he cried for mercy. He tried to move, but a gush of warm blood upon his face left him sick and trembling, and he fell back, to struggle again with the mind that would not do his bidding.

How time passed he did not know, but the moisture of the night was merciful, and his brain cleared sufficiently to give him one thought that he could hold: he must go to Heinrich. The going would involve calculation, and he tried to think it out, but his mind would hold but the one idea: he must go. He found his feet after some stumbling, and clenched the belaying-pin, to think which way to start. Yes, the trail led upward;

he wiped the blood from his eyes, and turned toward the lighthouse.

In after time he lived fragments of that walk in his dreams. Trees struck at him with blows that made his wound bleed afresh; serpents, guised as vines, twined about his feet, and he fell shrinking from their hisses. He must have left the path many times, but instinct served where reason failed, and at last his investigating fingers met the rough wall of the lighthouse, and he gathered his strength for a call.

And then came nothingness, broken, after æons of time, by a stinging in his throat that brought him back through space to puzzled study of a face above him. It was Heinrich's face, he decided. The whiskey that was being forced between his lips brought consciousness with a rush, and he felt of the couch beneath him, with an attempt at a smile. Heinrich saw the smile, and his hand shook.

"You 're better, sir?"

"Apparently." Mr. Proctor prolonged the syllables as if to assure himself of the fact. The alcohol was doing its work, and the situation seemed clearer. He felt oddly cheerful.

Heinrich was sponging the blood away, and the cold water supplied still further Mr. Proctor's missing links of memory.

"Where did you find me?" he questioned, "and what time is it?"

"It 's near daylight, sir. Can I leave you with Bertha, do you think, and go for the doctor?"

Mr. Proctor made a futile effort to examine his head. "Pretty well scalped, am I?" Heinrich's face answered him, and he debated the matter. "If you go for the doctor now, all the village will know. You ought to be something of a surgeon, Heinrich. Can't you wash this cut, and tie it up? The doctor can sew me together later."

"But it will hurt, sir."

"That means that you know how to do it. Then the quicker the better. Don't go for the doctor until I ask it, and never mind the pain."

But the pain was in no mind to be ignored, and when Mr. Proctor was bandaged and at rest, he had the wrathful consciousness that more lapses of memory were to be accounted for.

"Fainted, did I? H'm! Don't, Heinrich!" Mr. Proctor's own voice was somewhat uncertain. "I 'm all right."

"But who did it?"

"It was this way," and Mr. Proctor reviewed the story haltingly. "It would n't have happened," he concluded, "if I 'd had ordinary common sense. When Yngve came in sight alone, I did n't stop to remember that rogues hunt in couples."

"But to hit you this way, sir! Who do you think it was?"

"I don't know. Of course I 've suspicions. I don't think the attack was deliberate. The boy probably lost his head with fright. That is, if it was a boy."

"But why" —

"They had tried to make me think that you

were putting up these papers, Heinrich. They dropped your belaying-pin where I would see it. They knew it would go hard with them if I caught them."

Heinrich looked curiously impassive. The attempt on his honor moved him less than the sight of the cut on Mr. Proctor's head.

"Yngve doesn't like me," he said. "He took the pin — but some one else told him. Yngve talks a lot, but he would not hit you. He is afraid — except to talk."

Mr. Proctor tried to nod his bandaged crown, and failed. "But why should they wish to injure you with me?"

Heinrich did not answer at once. His grave eyes studied the young man with almost fatherly understanding.

"I am a friend to Dr. Edmister," he said at length.

Proctor closed his eyes wearily. "I see."

"There is more, sir," Heinrich went on, "about Yngve. It is since I knocked him down at the feed loft. The men laughed at him, because I was old, and could knock him down."

A numbing longing for sleep contended with Mr. Proctor's interest. "This must n't be known, if we can cover it," he said, with effort to make the world of consequence once more. "But I can't go home — that 's plain. Heinrich, I 'll have to ask you to go to the village. You can tell Jessie that I stayed at the lighthouse all night. If she asks questions, say that I talked of using your boat to

go out fishing — that 's a small enough lie to be moral — and tell Cole the same. I don't think that he 'll believe it, but it may stop some talking. Yes, and tell Cole to come up here this afternoon, at three o'clock, say."

Heinrich hesitated. "The doctor?"

"Don't go for the doctor till later. Ask him to keep his medicine case out of sight when he comes through the village. He 'll understand that I 've a good reason for all this secrecy. I hope that Yngve and his choleric friend will hold their tongues. And now I 'm going to sleep."

But he was not to sleep until Heinrich had prepared bed and breakfast — nor until a question had been asked.

"Heinrich," the man looked away as he spoke, "I know that I was pretty well shaken up even after you found me. I 've an impression that I did some talking. Can you tell me what I said? Did I mention names? — call any one?"

The sailor grew more ruddy than the wind had painted him, and looked reserved.

"Go on," Mr. Proctor pressed. "I would rather have the truth."

Heinrich swallowed hard. "You called Katherine Edmister. You thought — that" —

"I thought that she was hurting me," Mr. Proctor quietly supplied. "I remember a little about it." He turned his head painfully, and looked out at the summer dawn. "That 's all there is to it, Heinrich — the wanderings of a sick man. You 'll forget it, if I ask it, I know."

"Yes, sir," Heinrich said obediently. He walked as far as the door, then turned to look at the figure on the bed; its look of weary laxity deepened his eyes to sudden resolve. "Mr. Proctor," he walked back to the bed, and his voice was hushed, "if that 's true — what you talked about — why, God bless you, sir, and good luck! She 's a little thing, but so loving! Bertha can tell you. You 've both of you been good to Bertha, and — you don't mind — God bless you!"

The head upon the pillow turned to hide its tell-tale eyes. "But it is n't true, Heinrich, and you are to forget. But — thank you. Remember, it is n't true, but — Take care of her, Heinrich, if anything happens to her father and me."

CHAPTER XXIII

MR. PROCTOR SPEAKS

Dr. Edmister's mind, as he examined Mr. Proctor, hung between irritation with his patient, and admiration of Heinrich's skill.

"Why did n't you call me at once?" he grumbled, to hide the strain upon his throat. His fortitude was tried. If the blow had been a little more to the side, his friend at this moment would have been — what or where? The question hurt him. He was growing old, and friends were dear. He looked at this one with a sudden yearning to tell him so.

Proctor smiled. "I suppose that Heinrich has told you the story?"

"I 've pieced together most of it," the doctor said absently, his mind concerned with the necessities before him. "Go home for a time, Proctor, and rest. Get out of this atmosphere."

The young man's lips closed suggestively. "Not for fifty atmospheres."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

The wound was dressed, and the doctor ready to leave, before the subject came up again.

"You say that you won't go home, Proctor?" Dr. Edmister looked at his patient with an af-

fection which he did not try to hide. "Then, if you 're determined to fight it out, I 've one thing to say. Forgive me if I go back. I asked you once to wait. I now withdraw that request. One moment — do not answer — I ask no confidences. But we are fallen on evil days, and I wish to leave your hands free. If your feeling was an impulse that you have since outgrown, do not regret my speaking, for we shall be where we were before — yet nearer."

"The roads are still dusty," — Mr. Proctor's smile was wan, — "so my impulse has not changed. I dare to believe that it never will. But — I can't talk of it this morning, doctor. I — my hands are tied."

"Oh, as to that" — the doctor interrupted. "Well, I must go. No getting up till supper time, remember, if you insist on going home to-night."

"Just a moment! Dr. Edmister, this is n't the sort of thing that a man can thank another for; at least, I can't to-day. If I seem slow to act, try to believe that I 've strong reasons. But never again distrust the strength of my impulse. That remains."

The men clasped hands in silence. "I 'm going fishing," the doctor said casually, "and will look in again before supper time. Now take another nap."

Cole came at three o'clock. His methodical step was at curious variance with his bewildered eyes.

"I 've sent for you to review the situation,

Cole." Mr. Proctor began at once on the heart of the question. "You know the story of this year. We won't go over it. It has come to a point where Dr. Edmister and I seem to be arrayed against the village. Even you, who are conscientious, do not seem satisfied in my employment. Why?"

Cole leaned his head on his hand. "It is n't that you have n't been a good man to me, Mr. Proctor," — he groped to find speech for his reasons, — "but the Bible teaches us that righteousness can have no fellowship with unrighteousness. I don't know. I pray about it. But if I take your money have I a right to a share in the kingdom? Mr. Proctor, can't you come with us?"

Proctor lay silent. "One shuns me for my birthplace," he thought, "another for my manners; this man for my morals and belief. What a mask I must have worn that I should have reached no one! Cole," he said aloud, "you must work this out with your own conscience. Perhaps my way is not so far from yours, after all. The roads have different names, but the goal may be the same. But as to Dr. Edmister — I know you are his friend at heart — what turned people against him?"

"It 's the drink, for one thing," Cole hesitated. "He prescribes liquor sometimes. Dr. Griggs" —

"Yes, yes. But the drinking men are against him, too."

"He 's so thick with you that some don't like it. Then they — they think that you both feel yourselves too good."

"I suppose that 's the root of it all." Mr. Proctor had a black moment; his own folly seemed to have been Dr. Edmister's undoing as well. "About these anonymous warnings, Cole, and the meetings in the feed loft?"

"I don't know much. I did n't know about the warnings. There was trouble among the men when your uncle was alive. You see, he was a Southerner — the men say you 're the same, Mr. Proctor."

"I understand that side of it. Yes, a secret society was already in existence when I first came. Dr. Edmister was called there one night, and I went with him. Heinrich had had trouble with Yngve Torstenson."

Cole's reserved face moved to a show of amusement. He evidently, Proctor saw, knew the story better than it could be told him.

"Do you know why Heinrich hit Yngve?" Cole asked.

"No. But I think that Heinrich himself will tell me. To go back to these meetings. Dr. Griggs found a socialistic society already formed, and he organized a temperance club and united the two. Am I right?"

Cole looked protest. "Dr. Griggs urged us to combine temperance with labor, and fight under one banner." He fell at once into the doctor's flowery phraseology. "But I never went to the labor meetings, Mr. Proctor. Dr. Griggs did not advise me to go."

"Dr. Griggs had — discretion. In regard to

your own attitude, I wish that there had been better fellowship between us. I think, had we both been wiser, there might have been. I should ask you to stay with me now, and work toward a better understanding, if it were not that I look for stormy times. As it is, I don't want to influence you. Don't answer me now. Think it over. To-morrow morning I go to the mill and talk to the men. Then you can tell me what you have decided."

"To-morrow morning! Will you be well enough?"

"It must be to-morrow. Stop the machinery at ten, and call the men upstairs. I'll meet them there. I don't want them to know of this accident till after I've seen them. If they hear of this they will be on the defense, and I'll be ten times the taskmaster in their eyes. So keep it as quiet as you can."

"But you've no idea who did it?"

"I'll have a better idea before to-morrow's over. Well, Cole," Mr. Proctor held out his hand, "if you decide to leave me, I wish you well with all my heart. You are a good man."

At ten the next morning the men were gathered in the mill, and their faces assured Mr. Proctor, as he stepped before them, that the story of the lighthouse trail had not been told.

"Sit down, all of you," he said. "You can sit on the log rollers, there, and on the carriage. I know that you are tired, and I want you to listen. Sit down."

The men obeyed; their glances were confused and troubled. The white-faced man addressing them had more than his pallor, and the suggestive bandages around his head, with which to command their surprised obedience. His dominance, with all his quiet, was assured. Master of them he might be; master of himself he assuredly appeared.

And he in turn saw that which impressed him. He saw the slouch of limbs so wearied that they dropped, flaccid and unresisting. He saw greasy clothing and charcoal-blackened faces. Above all, he saw the poverty of thought and living that the vacant eyes expressed.

"Men, I have called you together to-day" — he spoke slowly, and stopped to choose his words — "to have a frank talk. We have not been on good terms since I came here a year and a half ago. There are many reasons for this, and we have both been at fault. Let us look at the situation fairly. To begin at the beginning, I came from the South; therefore you did not trust me. You were rude to me from the first, not on my own account, but because of my birthplace. That angered me, and I grew impatient of you. Then you began sending me these notices," — he drew a number of soiled papers from his pocket, and held them before him, — "threats, which you had not the power to carry out, against my life and property. To crown all, night before last, one who has been of your number struck me from behind. Whether he represented your feeling or not, I do

not know, but his intention, for the time, was murder. You see, do you not, that we must stop right here, and come to an understanding? I know that the trouble lies deeper than your dislike of me personally. You want something from me — shorter hours and better wages. Am I right, Stephenson?"

Aslag Stephenson, head sawyer of the mill, nodded. He looked puzzled and intent.

"As to the shorter hours," Mr. Proctor went on, "no. If we run the mill on shorter hours, we run it to its closing. It cannot pay. I have been over the figures carefully. Our season is short, and we are far from the markets. We must push work while the season lasts. I know that eleven hours is a long day's work, but eleven hours it must be, so long as the market stands as it does now. If I work two shifts I cannot pay you as much as I do now, and that you would like even less. The hours, then, cannot be changed. For the wages, I am paying now all that I can afford, and leave a safe margin of profit. But you are not working as well as you can. This is what I would propose: From now on, a percentage of all that is made above this margin I will divide among you, on a profit-sharing system that I will explain. I cannot explain this to you fully, for you would need to see the books; but if you will pick out one of your number whom you trust, and who understands figures, I will take him into the office and show him what I mean. I have been slow in offering you this percentage, for I needed

time to find out what I could afford to do. The business was new, and I needed a year of experience before I dared make changes. This, then, is your answer. No reduction of hours, and no change of wages except on a dividend basis. Have you other requests?" He stopped for answer, and the men shuffled and shook their heads.

"Have I touched on all that you wish to say?" he persisted. "This is your time."

There was further shaking of heads. "I think that is all," Stephenson ventured.

"Then it remains to me to state my intentions clearly. If you cannot accept the conditions I have made, and work peaceably, I shall dismiss you all. That sounds harsh — but think. I am giving you the best terms in my power, — my books will show that, — and the more smoothly you work the larger your profits. We have been falling behind lately. This cannot go on. Therefore, if, from now on, one hand is raised against me, if I find one more notice like these that I hold here, the mill shall be closed. You have worked together in hiding your meetings from me in the past; work together now in preventing them. For if one goes, all go. There is labor enough to be had somewhere, but even if I do not send for it, I can better afford to close my mill than to run it at a loss. Are you following me?"

The faces gave assent and attention, but Mr. Proctor stopped, and leaned against one of the upright timbers for support. The strain of his weakness was telling.

"If we are through with business," he went on again, "there is one thing more that I would like to say. We have, as employer and employed, made mistakes. That is no reason why we should go on making them. You took your stand against me without reason. My ways were new to you, therefore you did not like them. For my own part, I, too, was severe from lack of understanding. I could not see, for one thing, why you should be bitter over the war: you were the victors. I know now that though you are foreigners, many of you lost friends and brothers in the war, and that they died for a cause that was not their own because they felt that it stood for freedom — the freedom that they had crossed the ocean to find. And that is not the only thing that I have learned about you. I have learned of your strength of heart in coming into this wilderness to make a home; I have seen your self-denial that your children might go to school. And these things have made me wish to learn more; to go among you on a new footing of friendliness and confidence. I cannot do this, however, by making concessions that would hurt us all in the end. I have told you what I can do. From to-day we work on friendly terms or we part. You may go home now. This shall be a holiday. Talk it over; think it over; have meetings if you will. To-morrow is the first of August. That is a good time to begin on a new leaf. You need not tell me what you intend. If the mill starts to-morrow at six, that is all the answer I will need." He

stopped and smiled at the men. It was a grave smile, for he was tired, but it met a response that revived his flagging strength. The men slouched away without speaking, but they cast backward looks of friendliness.

Cole remained and looked at his employer anxiously. "You 'll go home now, Mr. Proctor, and rest?"

"In a moment. Yngve was not here. Did he come to the mill this morning?"

"No. Will you have him arrested?"

"For stealing Heinrich's belaying-pin? What should I do with him, with no jail within fifty miles? No, this is n't a matter for arresting any one; it 's patience that will count now. The men would have stayed with me, I think, if I 'd asked for a vote this morning."

"I wish you 'd done it. They 're all right now, but they may get to talking."

"A vote this morning would n't have stood for much but impulse. How suffocating this air is! No, I want them to agitate, and see Dr. Griggs, and stir themselves up generally. Then if they stay with me it will mean something. But I have not had my superintendent's answer."

Cole held out his hand with a spontaneity that was rare to him. "I 'm with you, Mr. Proctor. I prayed — I don't know whether I 'm right. But I can't do anything else. God could n't mean for me to desert now. If it was smooth times with you it might be different, but now it would n't be square."

Proctor took the hand, and let his eyes answer. It came to him that in his appreciation of Cole's allegiance his estimate of values had greatly altered in the year.

"You heard me tell the men that one of their number had struck me," he said later. "I owe you more of an explanation. I have good cause to think that it was Adrien Lauzeone — good cause, but no proof. I learn that Adrien has n't been seen since day before yesterday."

"But why should he run away? You did n't see him."

"No, but he had threatened me; then I used his name just before the blow came, and he may have thought that I saw him. I 'm sorry to believe that it was Adrien. He 's young; that makes me feel in a measure responsible."

Yes, he did feel responsible — and not for Adrien alone. The long stifling day of forced inaction wore upon his pain-racked nerves, and he was almost irritated to feel that his sharpest anxiety was not for himself. If he were forced to close the mill, what could the men do to live? The question cried for answer. He had become, whether he would or no, his brother's keeper.

But the compensation for it all came to him that evening as he sat at his window in the twilight. The girl whose love for the people had taught him this responsibility might not be for him, but this part of her thought he had learned to share. He held an understanding of her that no one could take from him; that was worth some pain.

CHAPTER XXIV

NEW FACETS

THE next morning dawned, as all the days dawned now, hot and cloudless. The mill's whistle blew the morning calls, and Mr. Proctor, breakfasting leisurely at his usual hour, did not look toward the yards. He would learn soon enough, and without effort, what was in store for him. He had found a note from Katherine awaiting him, and though it was in the simplest of phrases, expressing her pleasure in his escape, he wished to enjoy it undisturbed. It was the first time that she had written him, and the tangible evidence of her interest tempered the oppression of the morning.

Jessie projected her head into the opening of the kitchen door. She never walked definitely upright, and she never stopped; her body simply followed her investigating head in a slanting line.

"Aslag Stephenson 's waiting to see you," she cannonaded.

So it was to be war. Proctor turned an unmoved face. "I am going to my office. Tell Stephenson he can come to me there."

As he walked to the office he heard the whir of saws. They must, after all, be working, and have sent a delegate to see the books. Yet how could

Stephenson be spared? The man himself answered. His blond bulk filled the doorway, but despite his inches he was ill at ease.

"Is it the books, Stephenson?"

The giant grew ruddy. "No, sir, it 's to ask you to compromise. We had a meeting last night" —

"It 's of no use, Stephenson." Mr. Proctor turned to the door. "I gave you my answer yesterday. There is no ground for compromise."

Cole came in a moment later, and his expression did away with need of comment.

"Shall we shut down?" he asked.

"At once. The men were paid yesterday. Come to the office as soon as you 're through, and we 'll look the situation over. We 've several alternatives."

And so silence descended upon Wilsonport. The drone of the machinery was as much a part of the summer's life as the song of the cicadas by the roadside, and this unnatural stillness was more jarring than noise. Some vital principle of the year's unfolding seemed to be lost, and the strike, like the heat and the drought, confused the senses by its strangeness.

Life itself was confusing. The men, unused to liberty, grew moody and irritable in their efforts to use their freedom to its utmost. They waited for the initiative from Mr. Proctor, but he went through the days with an unconcern of manner that told them nothing. His wound was troublesome, and he gave himself over to idleness, with no apparent care.

"Go home, Proctor," Dr. Edmister begged at the end of the second week. The men were sitting on Mr. Proctor's porch, facing the lake. "You 're only making the men furious by doing nothing, and I don't want another cracked crown on my hands. This one of yours will take some time to heal, and you 're looking white. Is n't Detiere capable of handling Birch Creek alone?"

"Detiere is capable of handling this entire village, and I think that I 'll let him do it. My plans are about matured, and I was going to tell you about them. I 'm going to change crews, and open the mill — Detiere here, Cole at Birch Creek."

The doctor's face was an interrogation point.

"It will be easily done," Proctor went on. "Detiere can manage this mill with his Belgians. I 've been over the work with him, and he understands all that is necessary. Cole is to go to the shingle mill. That 's easier work for beginners, of course, and we 've picked up a few lads from the farms. We 'll be a little short-handed at both ends, but we can say that we 're running the two mills. That 's something."

"And I thought that you were sleeping afternoons, and reading week-old papers!"

"I 've had no opportunity to tell you what I was doing, and secrecy seemed necessary with the men. It 's a poor solution, but the best that offered."

"I don't see where you will lose from now on."

"I may not lose anything. But my way is n't clear as regards the men. I can't make concessions — that would be the elixir of madness. But

the men must have work. I would n't import outside labor; that would cut me off from taking these men back. Detiere's crew can be shifted at any time."

The doctor laid his hand on the young man's arm. "You 're taking a great deal of thought for these men who have tried to injure you."

Proctor's face did not light. "I 'm taking it too late, I fear. If I had acted on your teaching earlier — yes, Dr. Edmister, I could not know you and your daughter without learning charity — I might have saved the men from this open rebellion. Then I could have won them in time. They are easily swayed. It was Yngve who swung the balance against me last night."

"You think it was not — Dr. Griggs?"

"Yes and no. I think we 've been inclined to give Griggs too much credit. The seeds of revolt were sown before his time — he 's been little more than gardener. I think that I 've the story of Heinrich and the feed loft at last."

"He told you?"

"I suppose I trapped him into it. He said that he had made a vow not to tell, and in explaining what a vow was he blundered out enough of the story for me to supply the rest. It seems Yngve induced Heinrich to join their secret society. When Heinrich found that they were talking anarchy, he threatened to expose them; whereon Yngve taunted him with his vow."

"So Heinrich knocked him down," the doctor completed. "I thought that I saw the triumph of

the reformer in Heinrich's eyes that night. Well, if Dr. Griggs has n't been the driving wheel, who has?"

"They 've lacked a wheel — else all this would have come to a head earlier. As I see the situation now, Dr. Griggs has been little more than their oracle — their visible testimony that their views were sound and their ways righteous. He found this labor movement ready for his hand, and it suited his ends to foster it — up to a point. I 've no idea that he intended to permit this definite revolt. If he 'd wanted a strike, he could have brought it about two months ago. No, I doubt that we 'll hear much about him from now on. If the men don't work, they 'll have no money; if they don't have money, they can't pay him. He must have worked out the logic of that long ago. I think that Yngve has the reins now."

"Poor lad! With his temperament it was the turn of a copper whether he should preach anarchy — or salvation."

"Poor people, I should say!" Proctor turned in his chair impatiently as the thought came home to him. "For Yngve has their ear. I could hear him last night; he was talking in the square by the church. It would have had its ludicrous side if there had n't been so much at stake. He had Dr. Griggs's intonations and vocabulary and Adrien's ideas. It was an ingenious patchwork."

The doctor was silent for a time. "So the mill 's to open Monday. Will Detiere's men bring their families?"

"Not now. There 's nowhere to put them. We 'll try it as it is for a time. We may need the whole force to fight fire before the month 's over. The tamarack swamp south of the creek is burning — I heard last night — and I can't afford to let the fire spread into the heavy timber. I sent out men last night, but I may need more."

"We 'll have rain before many days. This drought can't last. It will seem good to hear the saws whistling again, but" — the doctor extended a warning hand — "don't work too hard. There 's need of your strength ahead."

The doctor had been gone an hour or more, when Mr. Proctor, turning easily in his lounging chair, heard the click of his gate. He looked but once, and was on his feet.

"Miss Katherine!" He took the girl's hand, and led her up to the veranda. "I 've waited for this every day since I 've been an invalid."

The girl had lost the happy comradeship of manner that she had shown him in the earlier summer. "I 've a plan," she announced rather breathlessly.

"So this is n't a visit?" There was disappointment in the question, whatever its raillery of tone, and Katherine answered it seriously.

"But, Mr. Proctor," she said slowly, "I 'm sure you know that I 've thought about you all these days. Yet we have n't had room to feel sorry, father and I, — we 've been so glad it was no worse. You must know that."

"It 's good to hear it, anyway," — the man smiled at the water, — "and it 's doubly good to see you. It 's been a long time."

"Yes, you have been very busy this summer." She dismissed the subject in some haste. "I've been to see Olive, and she told me about your plans — that Mr. Cole was going to Birch Creek. Please don't look black. Of course she ought not to have told me, but — I don't tell things, and she was worrying about her husband — about having him go out there alone. I told her I was going to tell you that she had told me, and made her say that she was willing. You're not vexed?"

"I like you to know about my plans. I'm not in the least — I am gratified, Miss Katherine." Mr. Proctor still smiled at the water. "Go on. All this is prelude."

"How easy you make things!" The girl gave a luxurious sigh. "Yes, it's a prelude. But, about the mill, — I was sure that you were doing something. I knew that you were not giving up as you seemed to be, and I've waited for the whistles every day. I knew that you would n't give up."

"Why would n't I?" It was childish, but he wished to hear her say it. He was entitled to some indulgence; he had few pleasures, and he had been ill. He enumerated his excuses even as he spoke.

The girl scrutinized him, and bit her lip. "Why, you could n't, and be — why, of course you could n't! I told father so — and so you see it was n't so much Olive's fault, after all — the telling me. And I want to go out to Birch Creek with Olive, and teach the school."

Mr. Proctor dropped his study of the water, and fell to earth with a crash.

"To Birch Creek!" he protested.

Katherine held out her hand at his dismay. "I've been dreading that tone. 'I am not mad, most noble Festus.' Let me show you how simple it is. Father has an invitation to read a paper at the National Medical Convention, or a something like that. It meets at Philadelphia next month. He 's been sending papers to the medical journals on a something with a long name, and they want him to discuss it. I think that he would go if it were not for leaving me. Now Olive can't go to Birch Creek without another woman — at least, her husband says that she can't. Don't you see how it all works out? If I can get the school there, I can stay with Olive, and at the same time earn some money, and father can go away." She stopped, with a climax of triumph.

Mr. Proctor turned the thought over. "It sounds feasible. Are you sure there 's a school?"

"Yes, there 's a school, and the term begins soon. I know that you did n't want to influence father before, but this is different. Will you try to make father see that I shall be safe, and that it is the right thing to do?"

"But Birch Creek! It 's a wild place, even with the men away. Miss Katherine, I don't like" —

Katherine rose with a grave little air of dignity. "Must I hear that from you both! Think, Mr. Proctor, of what it means to me. My father is not well. I have been alone with him this spring and summer, and have seen him change and grow

old from day to day. He has changed so much, and there has been nothing for me to do or say — but this is my opportunity. If he goes now, he will have excuse. He can't feel that he has deserted, or that I have been meddling. Even if he stays but a few weeks it will be a gain. Can you see how much is in the balance and still tell me that Birch Creek is a rough place?"

"I can tell you that I trust your wisdom, and that I will help you — always. In return — may I play guardian while your father is away, Lady Patricia?"

The girl flushed. "I 'm glad that Mr. Cabell went away before this trouble began." She made no attempt to hide her understanding of the allusion. "He would have been so impatient of it all! He never could make allowances."

"But am I to be guardian?"

"Is it always pound for pound with you?" she asked wrathfully. "Your idea of playing guardian would be to make me walk from Olive's to the schoolhouse with my eyes on a crack."

"Miss Katherine, I 'm serious."

"You always are serious." An attempt at a sigh escaped into a smile. "That 's why I don't want to promise. If you say to father that you 'll be responsible for my up-risings and down-sittings while he 's away, you 'll give me a great deal of time and thought that you can't afford to spare. You 'll be trying all the time to see that I 'm comfortable. You 're going to need all your time and strength for your own perplexities, and — and I don't want to promise."

"Then there 's nothing more to be said." The man picked up a book from the veranda floor, and straightened its crumpled leaves. "Where is Chevalier to-day?"

"Oh," Katherine groaned, "why did n't the fairy godmothers give me tact — and you perception! Can't you see that it 's only that I don't want to burden you more than is necessary? You must know that I would n't come to you as I do unless I felt sure of your interest and friendship for father and me. But you do take things seriously, and you 'd take me so. However, if you 're going to look at me in this way, — yes, a thousand times yes!"

The man's mouth quirked. "But it 's a serious matter, — the following of your mental processes. You may be right. Responsibility for your moods might prove a burden."

Katherine laughed. "It would be more than a burden — what Mr. Green would call a 'chore.' I must go now. And to think that the mill is to start Monday!" She rose and looked down at the silent buildings. "You will speak to father?"

"I 'll go with you now." Mr. Proctor hesitated. "Will you leave the school for me to arrange? I 'll be at Birch Creek a great deal from now on; it will be very simple."

"I think that it is always simple for you to be kind." The words faltered, and in dismay the girl seized upon another sentence. "Is n't it strange about Adrien! You know that he has disappeared, don't you?"

"Yes."

Katherine looked up. "What — why, do you know where he is?"

"The impression seems to be that he has shipped on a wood schooner. He had a quarrel with his father, the men say. His father wanted him to do some work for me."

Katherine looked rebuffed and doubtful. These smooth phrases were not Mr. Proctor's thought.

"Shall we go?" she asked, with a little indrawing of her lip.

The man looked at her over the back of his chair; his eyes could not hide his exultation that she should have read him so well. "But I've told you all that I know," he expostulated. "I've no knowledge of where Adrien is. My suspicions amount to nothing."

"You have suspicions? Adrien — Adrien and I were friends." Katherine's voice was suddenly difficult to control.

Mr. Proctor was making up his mind. "Miss Katherine, will you stay a few minutes longer — here, this chair is more comfortable — and let me tell you the story of my suspicions? You are committed to a long business tale if you do."

Katherine checked the affirmative that her lips formed. "Do you really wish to tell me?" she asked soberly. "You remember that I — that I once made trouble for you."

Was it possible that she was still grieving over that memory? Mr. Proctor studied her — he had opportunity, for her eyes were downcast — and her

close pressed lips told him that the thought that she had summoned was one of sore humiliation. She looked so like a hurt child that his hand went out to her.

"Now, is it fair" — his short laugh was at once emotion's herald and its check — "to build a wall between us on that ground? I've told you — a little — That memory is precious to me, Miss Katherine. Some day — But now I'm going to tell you this story."

He told the story fully. The notices, Heinrich's belaying-pin, Yngve, the night upon the lighthouse trail — he withheld nothing. They had fallen, as her father had said, on evil times; she must be armed with knowledge.

"But if Adrien comes to you," he concluded, "or if you see him accidentally, don't turn away. Whatever he did — and we don't know that he did anything — is past."

It was the poised, mature Katherine that with varying eyes had followed the growth of his story, and that looked up at him now.

"Was I wrong in giving up Adrien's friendship? I could n't hurt Ferdinante that way when I learned what I was doing. For Karen had hurt me — she did n't intend it. So I knew. But how can I help you with Adrien?"

"How can you help me?"

"How can I help you get him back? I know that you feel responsible for him, just as you do for the men. I heard — what you tried to do."

"But I failed with the men — utterly. One

does n't accomplish democracy in one speech after indifference of a year. I don't know how we can any of us reach Adrien. I think he 's in the woods in semi-hiding. People are too ready in assuring me that he has gone away. He 's probably preaching communism to the wood-choppers." He stopped and looked off at the lighthouse point. With his look came pictures of the lad and lass who had danced to Heinrich's violin less than a year before. No wonder that Adrien's name brought tears to the girl's eyes!

"Adrien will justify himself, yet," he said, with a change of tone. "Ferdinante will bring him to manhood if a woman can — and it was you who saved him for Ferdinante. Now shall we go and find your father?"

They found the doctor in his office. It was a long talk that the men had as the sun dropped to sunset. Katherine was not with them, but she was called at last and told that she had gained her point.

"And, Katherine," — her father held her hand a moment, — "Mr. Proctor tells me that he has promised to be guardian. You may have need of him. Remember that I wish you to go to him freely if you do."

The girl looked up. Her father and Mr. Proctor were looking at her intently. Did their quiet scrutiny mean that they felt that she would prove a care? She read their scrutiny as gravity over the responsibility that she might be.

"I 'll try not to give you trouble," she said a little unsteadily.

CHAPTER XXV

CROSS-CURRENTS

Six o'clock of the next Monday morning heard the call of the mill's whistles, and the drowsy village was galvanized to instant life. Each door showed a protruding head; the blue puffing smoke that rose against the sulphur of the morning sky stood for a surprise that to the on-lookers was near to tragedy. They were unprepared; Cole, always silent, had had no difficulty in keeping his movements from their knowledge, and Detiere's men had been brought in late the night before.

The opening of the mill was dramatic in that it was unexpectedly commonplace. The Belgians worked indifferently, stolidly oblivious of jeers and imprecations; Detiere, conscious to his finger tips of the effectiveness of his pose, looked a bronze statue of indifference; and Mr. Proctor, at work in his office, seemed equally unconcerned. The men could make nothing of the situation, and surprise deprived them of the power of vituperation, which had comforted them hitherto. Lack of excitement left them baffled. The importation of outside labor they had been prepared to meet and resent, but Louis Detiere's appearance changed the horizon; the cries of "scab," which they raised at intervals, seemed ineffective.

The next morning a committee waited on Mr. Proctor, and asked him to submit new terms. He heard them with patience, but shook his head.

"You must come to my terms," he said. "I gave you in the beginning the best terms that I can offer. I can only tell you again that if I concede more, the mill will be run without profit — if not at a loss. In the end that will hurt you as well as me. For no mill will come here if I fail. There 's too little good timber left. I gave you the opportunity to discuss this two weeks ago. For the present the subject is closed."

There was silence in the little office, as he finished, and the waves of heat that rose from the floor beat upon the company with the distinctness of sound.

"But there is work for you if you will do it," Mr. Proctor went on. "You can go into the woods and get out shingles by hand. I will buy all that you bring here to market."

The men listened sullenly. They had shaved shingles; it was harder than the mill work, and the pay was small. Then, too, they had no teams. Sick memories came of early days when they had worn wooden yokes and drawn their own carts to the settlement.

Mr. Proctor watched their faces. "I think that it is only fair to tell you," he said slowly, "that Detiere and his men go well armed — by my permission. This is because an attack was made upon me, and because I feel responsible for the safety of the men in my employment. If you

can understand — what is the truth — that I am trying to arrange this with your welfare in mind, you will not resort to force. But it may prevent trouble for you to know that Detiere's men are prepared for it."

The men walked away with bent heads. The day was lowering with a hot wind which tore the lake to spray; earth seemed leagued with air for their undoing. They wiped the dust from their moist faces, and their mouths grew dogged. Fair words did not put their names back on the pay-roll. As to going into the woods to get out shingles, that would be a confession of failure. Their leader had told them that labor must always keep the upper hand.

In the house on the bluff events moved swiftly. The doctor, once stirred, was a man of action. The house was to be closed for two months, Mr. and Mrs. Green were to go to Vermont for a visit, and Katherine was to teach at Birch Creek. It was, as Katherine had prophesied, very simple in the doing.

But "good-bys," Katherine learned, were not simple in the saying. Yet she said hers without tears. She stood alone with her father in the close cabin of the steamer, and was held tightly in a long embrace. The red plush settees wavered before her eyes, but her smile was brave.

"Good-by, daughter." It was the man who could not command his voice at this last moment. "Don't stay here. Let Mr. Proctor take you home with Olive. Good-by."

The gang-plank was withdrawn; the steamer gave a warning lurch, and backed away. The doctor grasped the white-painted rail of the stern, and looked down into the faces turned toward him, — Mr. Proctor, Heinrich, Olive, a group of men from the store, some who had been of the mill, and in the centre, Katherine, her eyes bright, her tremulous smile ready. He looked at them and at the village; and the scene, shimmering unsteadily in waves of heat, grew remote and unreal. Why was he leaving? He was needed there. Already he looked at the picture as from a world removed. The shifting floor under his feet belonged to the country that lay beyond the horizon line, and his heart cried for the land that was slipping away. It had never looked lonelier than now, as it lay parched and dust-blown before him; but its very dreariness clutched his heart. All that he saw he knew, as he knew the curves of his forest trail; it was his by right of labor. Had he the right to leave his post? The steamer turned the southern horn of the crescent, and the pier melted into indistinctness; the brown house on the bluff looked down from its rocky shelf with that air of abiding loneliness which an hour of absence of the family life can bring. Its shuttered windows echoed the good-by in the doctor's heart. It was good-by for two months only. Yet what might two months not bring?

The watching group upon the pier scattered slowly. Dr. Edmister's tall figure, familiar as the pines upon the lighthouse ledge, had gained dis-

tinction in their eyes, at this last moment, and they felt oddly lonely. Late awakening to remorse — that old punishment of Life, the schoolmaster — made their speech scant. The doctor had been always patient and tireless, they remembered now. Then they growled at the weather, and walked away.

Olive and Heinrich, who started home with Katherine, were vociferously cheerful — painting the pleasures of the doctor's trip with startling pigments. Mr. Proctor listened for a moment, then came to Katherine.

"Will you come down on the beach with me?" he asked. "We can go to the point and watch the steamer."

Katherine turned a look which did not conceal its gratitude, and they walked in silence to where the widening view showed them the steamer once more, a swaying exclamation point of gray breaking the blue which stretched to the horizon.

Mr. Proctor drew a water-bleached log down toward the wave line, and cushioned it with moss from a wind-blown hemlock.

"There!" He studied his upholstery with an admiration that gave him excuse for avoiding the girl's eyes. "You are to sit there, and cry to your heart's content. Cry as you've been wishing to all this week. For a little while don't try to be brave."

To his surprise the girl turned to him a pair of clear eyes.

"How did you know — but you 're wrong, after

all. I don't want to be left alone, and I 'm not going to cry. I want to talk to you for a moment; then I must go to the house and help Olive. We go to Birch Creek to-morrow. And you 're not to give your charge a moment's thought. I 'm not going to be lonely. I 'm going to work — work. I learned it in the copy books — that work was a refuge."

"A refuge?"

"From unpleasant thoughts. I've read it from my Second Reader on — that work was a narcotic for unhappiness."

"And sometimes an outlet for joy?" The question sounded casual, but the man dug among the stones at his feet with unnecessary energy.

"I don't know. Joy means contentment," said the girl sagely. "If people are satisfied with what the day brings them, why should they go out in the highroad, where the stones are rough and the sun hot?"

"'Ambition — by this sin fell the angels'?"

"Oh, ambition!" The girl frowned, though a dimple shifted. "That 's a word, a formula, a phrase to hide behind. I've thought of it often lately. I have n't been happy this winter, but when I was busy I could forget. And I 've wondered if that was what pushed people to great deeds — that they might forget. It 's a strange thought — that the pictures that have been painted, and the bridges that have been built, stand for the men and women who have found that they had blundered — that life was n't giving

them what they had the right to expect — and who have been too proud to complain."

The man was at a loss for reply. If he took her seriously — She solved the query with a catch of laughter.

"How sorry you must be for me," — her lip gave an unexpected quiver, — "to listen in such a matter of fact way! But I 'm not going to be lonely — father would grieve. And I came down here to ask you not to think of me as in your charge."

"But you are in my charge. I 'll try to be an indulgent guardian."

"Please don't think it a jest. I know that you and father felt that I did n't understand ; that I did n't know how serious the situation had grown, and that I might try to live at Birch Creek as I have lived here. But I do understand. I 'll promise anything you like. It shall be from Olive's to the schoolhouse, and from the schoolhouse to Olive's. I 'll not stray an inch from the highroad. Only, you 're to promise not to think of me as a care; not to consider me in your charge."

"But, Miss Katherine, it is a pleasure" —

"For you, perhaps, — not for me. For please see my side of it. For you — I know that you are ready — that it is a pleasure — to do a kindness. But there is no need of giving you unnecessary care. I realize — more than you think — the weight that you are carrying. There is something strange in the air. The drought, the heat ; it is

all beginning to tell. We are none of us ourselves. Don't you suppose that I can see how this affects you? You have more than a man's burden. You must hold the men to sanity, yet go on with your business. You need a steady hand — and all of your time."

"If I may see you occasionally, it will help me — keep my hand steady."

She looked at him almost wistfully; her glance begged that he should not put her off with small courtesies.

"You have been too busy this summer," she went on, her mouth set to determined gravity, "to come to see father as you used to do. Yet I know that there has been no change in your friendship. It has been only that you were absorbed. And now you will be more so. You won't have time to think or speak to me till this is over."

He looked at her hopelessly, moved, through all his sudden wrath, by the grim humor of the situation. Now that his honor at last permitted him to see something of this girl, was she to build new barriers between them?

She was, and moreover she was doing it with a dignity of intention that he could not overlook. Try as he might, he found no trace of pique in face or tone. He saw her point of view with disquieting clearness. She wished to carry her share of the day's burden, and would do it by taking what responsibility she could into her own hands.

He rose, and threw a handful of pebbles at the

water. "Does n't it occur to you that as elderly — and remarkable — a person as you announce me to be might be competent to arrange his own times — to suit his pleasure?"

"But you do see what I mean, Mr. Proctor?" Eyes and mouth spoke radiant satisfaction. "I promise to be twice as careful as even you would ask. And now I must go home."

They walked to the point in silence. Mr. Proctor was biting back some sentences; they did not belong to his present character as cold and cautious guardian.

As they rounded the point, Paul Livingstone stood in their way. He stopped, and raised his hand. Mr. Proctor's bow he did not appear to see, but he stepped in front of Katherine.

"So your father left you," he said pityingly. "Did he think to escape from the wrath that is to come? Tell him that the city of refuge is not to be found by flight; that in the Day of Judgment the strong will be scattered even as the weak."

Katherine raised her eyes; clear and steady they met the wavering intensity of the schoolmaster's glance.

"My father is coming back soon, Mr. Livingstone; but what do you mean?"

The man pointed to the black-piled clouds that lay on the horizon, then to the dust-laden forest. "Search the Scriptures." He walked away, but his voice followed them. "'The hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence.' The Lord

has written his warnings for him who cares to read."

Whatever her will, Katherine shivered. "Let us go." She drew nearer to Mr. Proctor. "Oh, if it would only rain!"

CHAPTER XXVI

DAY BY DAY

KATHERINE'S cry for rain was not more insistent than Mr. Proctor's unspoken plea for a few days of calm weather. The clouds, which held no rain these latter days, were prodigal of wind, and the beach was lined with wreckage. So long as Dr. Edmister was on the water, Mr. Proctor watched his barometer with anxiety.

But the three days that the steamer needed to Chicago passed in quiet, and letters followed soon after. The doctor was well; was having a pleasant trip. In the schoolroom on the Birch Creek road, Katherine, with a mouth that relaxed in curves it had sometimes forgotten this past year, smiled at her dozen pupils.

There was little smiling in the village. September, whose name had held healing in its syllables as it summoned pictures of autumns gone before, had come, and brought no change. The chill of the lengthening shadows could not color the dried and dropping leaves. The land lay parched and gasping.

The sun was veiled, indeed, but days proved that what had at first seemed fog, was the low lying smoke of forest fires. Mr. Proctor doubled his

force along the fire line, but the tangled depths of the tamarack swamps guarded the smouldering sparks with a cunning that overmatched the men. Wood schooners, touching at the pier, brought grave reports from the next county. Rain must come soon, or the loss of timber would be widespread.

At Xavier Lauzeone's the men talked vaguely of the might of labor, but the heat which robbed their nights of rest palsied their thought and will. A few went into the timber and began work, but public disapproval manacled their steps; the mill, meanwhile, whirred on its undisturbed way, and Detiere's black-browed crew smiled insolently as they pointed to the growing piles of lumber.

Mr. Proctor went through the furnace of the days with an even pace. The muscular leanness of his long limbs was telling now, and he forced his way through the numbing lassitude that mastered others.

He was driving, as Katherine had said that he would, with a steady hand. But whither did the road lead? He could not look ahead; but he went on and on, counting each day as gain, though the goal was hidden. His mills prospered; not so the men whom he chose to consider as his responsibility. The see-saw of interest made his position a constant effort for balance. If Detiere's crew did their work as well as it had been done in Cole's day, they would presume upon their success. That would mean riot. Yet, if the mills did not make money, what could the man do whose purse stood for the livelihood of the village?

His overtures to the men must be tentative. He had tried to meet them frankly — and had been repulsed. His dignity as a superior force was a needed weapon in his armament, and he would not blunt it.

It came to him as possible that he might reach the women. The elementary needs would have double force with them; children were hungry, whatever the ethics of a cause, and credit at the mill store would not last. But the withdrawal that met his efforts at friendliness with the wives showed that it was late to gain a hearing there. He had built no foundations. Half-lifted eyebrows made him aware that the tale of his slights to Karen had found listeners. The absurdity of the misunderstanding did not make it the less pitiful. The facts, as lived before the women, moved them less than the suggestion that one of their number had been jilted by the man who held them in his power. Karen's open preference for the schoolmaster had not impressed them, save as an expedient of hurt vanity. Whatever their respect for Livingstone, they were evidently scornful of him in the capacity of cavalier.

There remained Yngve — but Yngve had tasted the wine of leadership. And in this leadership lay a shadowing of tragedy, as Mr. Proctor knew. Yngve's blatant generalities would lead the men only so far — he could not convince them to concerted action. They distrusted his youth, yet lacked an abler mouthpiece. Concerted action could be met in the open, but this formless irrita-

tion would find head in the insanity of a blind clamor for revenge. Then it would be a knife or a blow in the dark.

There were days when Mr. Proctor's composure was a poor mask — days when the futility of it all weighed mercilessly. Cui bono? But physical weariness was his friend. Grinding labor gave him dreamless sleep — then strength for the next day.

He rode often to Birch Creek, but not to see Katherine. His first visit to her had been met with such a mingling of reserve and pleading gentleness that it seemed cruel to repeat it. She could see in his courtesies nothing but effort to fulfill his promise to her father. Remembering his avoidance of her during the summer, what better understanding could he ask? He knew that she was well, and he contented himself, as he rode by the schoolhouse, with a glimpse of Chevalier, who sat, a frigid image of responsibility, upon the door-stone.

Olive he saw often. Her white kitchen was a breathing-place. Here was a household spirit that moved serenely, careless of the grimness of the forest so long as her husband shared her life.

Katherine was happy, Olive said. The girl's books lay on the table; her hat hung on the nail by the door. The air told of home and contentment, of courage that helped Mr. Proctor through his weary days.

He was thinking this, somewhat indefinitely, one afternoon as he turned his horse homeward. He

was later than usual, and might meet Katherine on the road. He drew his horse to a snail's pace at the suggestion. But the dusty stretch before him remained unbroken, and the sharpness of his disappointment turned him with a frown to the schoolhouse. He was acting a boy's part. He could at least give himself the satisfaction of her face.

The children had gone home, and Katherine sat, back to the door, examining a pile of slates. The dust of the highway padded the horse's hoofs with silence, and Mr. Proctor came unobserved to the door. He stopped, till his mouth should be able to hide its telltale joy. The impressive preoccupation of this schoolmistress must be met with an attempt at equal solemnity.

He coughed at last. "They always cough on the stage," he said apologetically, "when the heroine refuses to turn around."

"Oh, Mr. Proctor!" Katherine was on her feet, regardless of slates or dignity, "I 'm so glad! I 'm so glad!"

The man stepped over the sill into a new earth.

"So am I," he said blankly. Happiness does not always give command of thought.

The girl drew back. "Look out for the slates!" She still breathed quickly, and her eyes were kindling. "I 've been planning all day how I could reach you. I did n't want to alarm Olive. I had n't heard you go by. And you came!"

The man made his way around the slaty wreckage, and took her hand. "Yes, I came." The

hand in his own was trembling, and the knuckles of his free hand whitened. "Who frightened you, Katherine?"

It was not Katherine's hand alone that trembled now. She leaned on the desk behind her for support.

"It 's no use to say that I 'm not frightened, is it?" She met his eyes bravely. "But it was n't for myself. It 's about you. And what if you had n't come!"

"What if I had n't!" The fervor of one reprieved throbbed in the exclamation. "What can I get for you?" He drew her into the one chair. "A drink of your own water? H'm! I don't like your dipper." He foraged in her lunch basket until he found a cup, and stood over her while she drank. "Now, Lady Schoolmistress," he drew the recitation bench near her, "what are we going to do about these slates?"

"But don't you want to know what it 's all about?"

He laughed and bent toward her. "See if you can hold that slate steadily while I count ten. That 's better — but none too good."

"But I 've something" —

"Oh, Lady, Lady!" He sat, elbow on knee, a picture of content, and gave his eyes holiday. "What can you tell me that will mean more than what I have this minute? You 're here — alive; I 'm here — alive. To-morrow 's — to-morrow."

Katherine's head went back with a sigh of satisfaction.

"See how yellow the sunshine looks on the wall!" she said absently. "I sit and watch it sometimes till it brings back the old feeling, — the love of the woods and the sun. If I sit where I can't see the window, I can forget. But" — her tone came back to its normal cheerfulness — "the equinoctial storms will be coming now. And when Ferdinante" —

"So it 's Ferdinante!" He had found one of Katherine's gloves, and drew it slowly through his fingers. "Is she going to play the Borgia — and what 's my offense?"

"Don't laugh! I found her waiting for me this morning. Think of her reaching here so early! She told me to tell you to be careful; not to go out alone at night. I 've been here all day with no way to send you word. I 'd made up my mind to drive to Wilsonport to-night — some way. I was sitting thinking of it when you came. And you 're never careful! Can't you go home?"

"But why in the world did Ferdinante come to you?" The man did not intend to say the words aloud. He was absorbed in his irritation that Katherine should have been annoyed.

Katherine crimsoned, but she looked at him proudly. "I think that it was because she knew that I would be concerned about your danger," she said simply, "and that I 'd contrive some way to send you word. She may have been afraid to go to you herself."

Mr. Proctor laid his hand upon the girl's for the space of a second. "I 'm not quite a churl,

Miss Katherine. Of course I know why Ferdinante came to you. She was searching for something that she could do for you in return for what you 've been to her; so she manufactured a danger to threaten your friend. But it 's hard to see you annoyed — needlessly."

"But it 's not a manufactured danger, Mr. Proctor! I 'm sure it is n't. You must listen to it. She would n't tell me anything definite. But she said to be careful about going out at night. She would n't tell me whom she was warning you against — but it 's the warning itself that counts."

"It 's Adrien, probably. I thought I saw him on the road the other day. What a splendid child of the woods and the wild spaces Ferdinante is!" The man's breath of admiration carried him to his feet. "She does n't know how to stoop to a subterfuge — even to shelter that rascal Adrien."

The cloud that Adrien's name could always bring fell over Katherine.

"I asked you once," she said a little timidly, "if I made a mistake in giving up Adrien's friendship. You did n't answer. I wonder if you 'd mind answering now."

Mr. Proctor gave his absorbed attention to the map-hung wall. This girl's unexpected and swift-vanishing humilities always left him suspended between his impulse to tease and his rush of longing to tell her that he loved her. The matter-of-fact answer that he dragged from some underworld of consciousness came slowly.

"I don't know. I 'm a negation about most

things now. But I know that you did the thing that looked right — the hard thing — so I 've confidence that in the end it will work out as it should. That 's my anchor these days, Miss Katherine, — the knowledge that you and your father have kept your belief in inherent goodness untouched. But some of us have blundered with Adrien. There must have been opportunity to reach him ; to show him his fallacies ; to convince him that he was right in the beginning — that education was, after all, a touchstone."

Katherine's eyes sparkled to a reminiscence. "I heard you tell father, once, that you did n't believe in education for the masses."

The man tasted his share of embarrassment ; yet that was the least of the many inconsistencies that Katherine undoubtedly had seen.

"Everything was abstract in those days," he laughed. "Now it 's vividly concrete. That 's the influence of the village — as against the city. But we 'll reach Adrien yet — if we can find him."

"But you will be careful, Mr. Proctor ? You 'll promise to be careful ? "

He picked up her glove again. "Of course I 'll be careful. Am I not guardian ? Have I not a ward ? A stubborn and rebellious ward that needs my chastening care ? "

Katherine looked up with a new thought ; she gave a little laugh of private understanding and pleasure.

"You 're Mr. Cabell's guardian, too," she said. "Poor, overburdened man ! "

There was a moment's silence; and in it Philip stood beside them, summoned by his name. He seemed a palpable presence, laughing as ever, assured and debonair.

Mr. Proctor's smiles died. The happy inconsequence of the hour was over, and he turned away with the feeling that it was late, and that he had been living a foolish daydream.

Katherine rose and picked up her hat. There was a barrier in her manner that irritated them both. They remembered that outside lay a dusty road, and that they were tired.

"Mr. Detiere seems to be trying to run both mills," Katherine said, as they walked toward Birch Creek. Her tone was a spiritless effort to hide with a veneer of phrases her knowledge of the sudden chill between them.

"You see Detiere?"

Katherine's chin lifted. "Frequently."

"Since you promised to stay on the highroad, that means that he goes past the schoolhouse."

"It 's a public thoroughfare," Katherine said impassively. "Mr. Detiere is a great convenience in maintaining discipline. He stops at the schoolhouse window sometimes, and after one look from him the children don't move for an hour."

Mr. Proctor bit his lip. "It might be well if you shared the children's prejudices. I wish that you would not consider this as a personal matter between you and me. You promised your father to tell me if Detiere annoyed you."

The sudden flush in the girl's face was hostile.

"How little you understand!" she cried. "Don't you see that Louis Detiere is eaten up with pride that he can carry on the work where George Cole failed? He owns us all — Your mills, my school, Birch Creek. Till this is over, he will keep sober, and will follow your wishes to the division of a hair. I did n't say that he spoke to me. I said that I saw him. He does go by the schoolhouse, and he looks in to see that all is well. He will never speak to me. He has a code. But you will never understand."

They had reached George Cole's cabin, and she gave Mr. Proctor a long look as she opened the door. That, with the briefest inclination, was her only farewell. It may have been that the face watching hers did not encourage civilities. The two had forgotten the fiction of guardian and ward. They were man and woman, and they were bitterly angry. Yet neither could have told at what.

As Mr. Proctor untied his horse, the smoke that hung above the trees was beaten downward by the wind till it stood like a wall between himself and the spot where Katherine had looked good-by. The sun was low, and the black woods were more than ever dreary. And Philip was at Old Point Comfort for a week; his last letter had mentioned yachting parties, and had used indifferently words that had lost meaning in these grim surroundings. Why did he not return to claim his own — if his it were? Mr. Proctor's mouth grew resolute. He would end this. He would write Philip to come

now, or not at all. For his own part, his endurance was at an end; never again would he talk to Katherine till he was free to ask a question and be answered.

It was dark when he rode into Wilsonport, but the straggling street was alight and astir. A bonfire was blazing in the square before the church, and its leaping light showed Paul Livingstone preaching to an attentive group. Mr. Proctor drew rein in the shadow and listened. He could hear little, but the crouching figures of the listeners suggested that the message that they heard was one of fear.

He rode on, his heart no lighter for the incident, and Livingstone's voice, rising now, rang after him, "'The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come.'" As he listened the moon pushed a blazing disk above the line of the smoke-hung lake, and its track upon the water stained the night with red. A group of men took courage of the darkness, and cursed him as he passed. And he had parted from Katherine in anger.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE WAITING

"'There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign,'"

sang the people in the square. The last week of September had come, and still there was no deliverance. The smoke cloud, heavier every day, pressed its black weight upon the village till breathing was a pain. The lake, lashed by the constant wind, rolled stormily in the semi-darkness; steamers blew their whistles night and day as they groped up and down the shore line.

Night after night the group that gathered around Paul Livingstone swelled in size. The schoolmaster had returned from his lonely days in the woods, and he brought an assured message. The day of the Lord's coming was upon them — "the end of the world!" "the Day of Judgment!" Every look at the relentless sky drove the phrases nearer home. And if the fire was the Lord's will, it was blasphemy to oppose it. Those who believed, prayed and sang and waited, while Paul Livingstone moved among them, assured and calm. The visions of the forest were realities of which he spoke with confidence. His work now was to prepare his followers for that inevitable

day of which they had been told, — "a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness." The words were with him always, as he pointed upwards. Could they doubt?

There was little of terror in the faces of the waiting crowd. They were not only awe-struck; they were tired. Life pressed heavily. They were bewildered, rudderless; they were numbed by the smoke-filled air; and Karen's voice invited them to scenes the thought of which filled their smarting eyes with tears, —

> "'Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
> Stand dressed in living green.'"

"In living green." The words were balm.

In the mean time there was work to be done, and none to do it. The lines in Mr. Proctor's face were graving deep. The fire was spreading; how fast no one could tell. It crept, the men said, under the ground, and ate into the heart of the great trees, till, though sound to the eye, they fell in blazing ruin. Birds dropped in the dooryards, burned and strangled. There was none to tell how far their flight had carried them. The men whom Mr. Proctor had relied upon as fire guards were growing exhausted. He could find no others.

Yet with each discouragement his responsibility deepened. When this apathy should end, when the rains should come — what then? If he lost his timber, he could not give the men work. The mill problem retreated. There had always been logging and coopering to fall back upon. That gone, what was before them?

Not all of the village followed Livingstone's lead, but even the skeptical were immovable when asked to help. They might scorn the fear of doomsday which held their companions, but the irresponsibility which the thought bred was contagious, and they became openly and insanely careless of the future. Xavier Lauzeone's way was far from rose-lined; his politic soul was torn by much that passed under his roof.

There was no thought in Mr. Proctor's mind now of sending for Philip. All personal desires were pushed aside. Life was endurance and waiting. He went to Dr. Griggs at last, and asked for help.

"Talk to the men," he said. "They 've been your tools. And talk to Livingstone. Show him the injustice of his teachings. I 'm not concerned with his religious belief, but this fire is threatening all of us. The men are drugged. You 've interests at stake. Wake them up! Send them out into the woods."

Dr. Griggs listened, with a shrug of the shoulders. It was the first time that he had talked directly to Mr. Proctor, and he would not put the opportunity by.

"We 'd have made a great team if you 'd come to me earlier," he suggested. "Now it 's too late."

Mr. Proctor's impulse to turn his back was conquered.

"You 're shrewd enough to know that your bread and butter are at stake," he said curtly.

"What's your answer? Will you help me with the men?"

The doctor's shoulders again cried their negative. "I can't help you. I'd stop this if I could. But the men won't listen. Go to Mr. Ellis — the parson — and Heinrich."

"No need to go to them. I'd find them in the swamps — with their hands blistered."

And so the days passed; not in monotony, but in fevered happenings small in themselves, yet barometers of the prevailing unrest. It was a day of the unexpected. Yngve Torstenson rose one night and confessed to the audience in the square his share in the adventure upon the lighthouse trail, but even that story, new to some of them, made little stir. An attempt upon one life seemed trivial, now that all lives were in the balance. Few paused to wonder that Mr. Proctor had allowed the matter to slip by. "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth." What room had their hearts for fear of human retributions?

The evening of the 5th of October George Cole drove to Mr. Proctor's door. His face spoke calamity.

"What is it, Cole?" Proctor turned from his paper-strewn desk. "Have your men left you?"

Cole nodded heavily; his face looked dull and set. "I've four boys left. The last man went to-day."

Proctor debated the matter in a moment's silence. "Have the boys plough a wider firebreak," he said, as his shoulders squared. "Then

place them as guards for the mill. We 'll win yet, Cole. Every day that we hold out means a day nearer the rain. This panic of Livingstone's will end with the first northeaster."

Cole walked to the window, and leaning his head against the casement, looked over to the square. "The men said what was the use of working when the world was burning up." His tone was that of monotonous acquiescence.

Proctor studied his superintendent's bent face. "They 're taking a drought rather seriously," — unconsciously he used the aggressively buoyant manner that he would have employed with a frightened child, — "but this will be over in a few days."

Cole shook his head moodily as he resumed his study of the square, and Mr. Proctor checked the further exhortation on his lips, and joined him at the open window.

There were no bonfires in the square now. They had not been needed for days, for the glow that filled the heavens lit the earth with a blood-tinted radiance. It was a picture to banish speech; even the lake, dull red and sullen, looked a thing of horror. The night was unnaturally still, and in the hush Paul Livingstone's voice reached them in the awful warning of Zephaniah, —

"'Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.'"

The men at the window listened for a time in silence, while the whistle of a smoke-bound steamer droned accompaniment to their thought. Karen, her white dress stained by the red of the sky, was singing now, but there was nothing but terror in the words.

> "'That awful day will surely come,
> The appointed hour makes haste.'"

"Do you believe it, Cole?" Mr. Proctor turned at last. "Do you, too, think, 'What 's the use?'"

Cole looked at him. "I believe it. But I 'll keep at the work."

For a moment Mr. Proctor knew the savor of the dust of futile effort. "Why? — if this is the end?"

"Because I promised you." Cole's face, still gray, looked dogged with resolve. "That 's all that 's left us now, — to keep the promises we 've made, and wait."

"And wait." Mr. Proctor murmured the words as he turned to his calendar. "To-morrow is the 6th. Dr. Edmister won't reach here before the 15th, unless news of the fire brings him earlier. Cole, I 'm going out to-morrow to bring Miss Katherine in to the village. She 'll be safer here until her father's return. Would n't it be well for your wife to come with her? If the men come to active revolt, they 'll probably begin at Birch Creek."

Cole nodded understandingly. "I know. But Olive won't come. I 've talked to her, but she won't leave me. I 'm glad you 're coming for

Katherine, though. There 'll be one less to worry about, and I think that she 'll be glad to get away."

But that was a thought that Katherine laughed to nothingness. Mr. Proctor drove directly to the schoolhouse the next afternoon, so timing his arrival that he might find her alone, and he stated his errand somewhat bluntly. The girl's confusion at sight of him wounded and confused him in turn, and made him brusque. The memory of their last stormy interview was keen. This playing guardian was not easy work, and in his embarrassment he said as much.

The girl's lips lost a little color. "But why make your responsibility so tragic?" Her tone was almost indolent. "Mr. Cole will take care of me."

"But Mr. Cole wants you to go."

"Does he?" Her face looked suddenly wan. "But Olive wants me here — needs me," she said, brightening. "And after all, why should I go?"

"Why should you not go — except that I ask it? Miss Katherine," — the man took advantage of his height, and looked down upon her with stern assurance that became his steady eyes, — "we are talking at cross-purposes. You are on the defensive with me, as you always are of late. I don't know why. It 's an old feeling between us. But with all your distrust of my motives, you have given me a certain sort of confidence, and it was the knowledge of this confidence that enabled your father to leave you as he did." He had been forming his sentences with scholastic precision, to curb

the words of loving wrath that were near his heart to say. Willful, thorn-set Katherine, so childishly annoying, so stubbornly true! The longing to catch her in his arms, to scold her, to laugh at her, to dominate her, gripped at his composure. "Lady Katherine," — his voice was a confession, — "I beg you — it is n't easy — come with me."

The girl's lips tightened, then slipped from her control, and quivered pitifully. The man's soul was in the dust. He felt that he had trampled upon her without mercy. Was it the thought of her father that had broken the fine temper of her self-command? He turned away to let the situation pass, and the girl set her teeth determinedly.

"I will go with you, Mr. Proctor," she said in a moment, "since you think it best."

"Don't you think it best too?"

"I don't wish to think so. I ought not to leave Olive, and I particularly dislike to give up my school. Those are my 'don'ts.' Will you tell me why you think it best for me to go?"

The "why" seemed insufficient, after all, and he groped to find it. In Katherine's presence his imaginings seemed vain. It may have been the magazines upon her desk, with their suggestion of the brisk common-sense world of affairs; it may have been the mounting courage in her eyes, but there was that in the atmosphere which relieved the tension of his feeling. A cluster of Olive's red geraniums was tucked into the girl's belt, and the bright blossoms seemed an expression of Katherine's self, — a challenge to the stifling air. The

drought, with all its discomfort, seemed suddenly an incident, a local happening. There was a world outside pursuing its unchecked way, and the thought of it belittled the importance of the meetings in the square.

"If there 's trouble with the men," Katherine was answering his vague objections, "I 'll be in the way, I know. But so will Olive. We can take the white horse, and drive into town at once. And there 's more than my interest in the school at stake. You are the leaven of sanity in Wilsonport. You seem so methodical and composed that you steady the people. And I 'm of a little use in the same way here. The men have left the mill; every one is on edge. If I desert the school, it will be one feather the more on the wrong side of the balance. Can't you see?"

Yes, he could see, clearly. He acknowledged it to himself, with comradeship in her pride. But as he looked at her, the feeling died. It was not her part to stand alone, and he rebelled at her sufficiency. If he had but the right —

"Decide it for yourself, Miss Katherine."

The tone was not to be mistaken, and the girl smiled, with a tremor which escaped the man's eye.

"Petruchio's Kate?" she said a little wistfully. "But really I 've nowhere to go" — she hurried over the admission. "Do you think we 're in danger from the fire?"

An evasion would have served his purpose, but he refused its shelter. "No danger, except from the smoke. The smoke 's worse here than in the

village. That 's why I had Cole widen the fire-break. The potato field is guard enough so far as the fire 's concerned."

"The smoke is trying, of course ; your own eyes are beginning to show it," — she gave a flitting look, — "but it is n't excuse for running away, is it?" She faced him with sudden mischief. "I 'm talking to a man who is running his mills and conducting his business as usual, while half of his people are insane with fright, and the other half are held only by his steadiness from riot — or worse. What can such a man say to a woman who is trying to do her small part in her own way?"

The man said nothing till he picked up his hat. "He says that he is overruled by a woman's sophistry." He held out his hand for good-by. "He 's not convinced, but silenced." He could not keep his irrational content from his tone. When the air cleared between them it was easy to be happy!

He was driving away when Katherine called him. Chevalier was whimpering in her arms, and she held him out with an apologetic smile.

"Can you take him to Bertha? Ask Bertha to keep him shut up, please, or he 'll try to come back to me."

"But why?" The smile died from Mr. Proctor's face. "I 'll take him with pleasure, but — Katherine, you 're afraid, after all. Come with me. Come!"

The girl lifted her head, and for a startled mo-

ment looked full in the man's eyes. The glance robbed them both of composure.

"I can't!" she breathed protestingly. "Don't ask it! And I 'm not afraid. Only, Chevalier is all I have — that is, I 'm his Providence, and — you don't mind?"

The man took the dog. "I may keep him myself?"

"Oh, will you? Think, Chevalier," — she covered the dog's appealing eyes with her palm, — "of all the chicken that Jessie will give you! Please hurry, Mr. Proctor." She had a whimsical smile for her own weakness. "I 've never sent Chevalier away before, and he won't understand. We don't understand Providence, do we?" The dash of philosophy was a cover for the mist in her eyes.

The man tucked the dog under the shadow of his coat, and lifted the reins. Then he stretched out a hand to the girl, and sought her eyes. "It 's very simple," he said insistently. "Put your foot on the step, take your seat beside me, and I can save you from discomfort and possible danger, as you are saving Chevalier. Can't you bow to Providence even if you don't understand it?"

The girl shook her head. "It 's only till next Friday. Help me to save my foolish little vanity till that time. You can't monopolize the pride of this situation."

She watched the carriage till it was a blur of dust. Was it imagination, or could she hear Chevalier crying for her? The forest, which had

been her friend, looked sinister in the waning light, its pillared vistas grim and murky; and she went back to the schoolhouse to escape the crushing majesty of the out of doors. The loneliness of Nature beat upon her spirit as never before, and she sat for a long time, her head upon her hands, learning a new lesson. Pride was a costly possession, and it was not for women. Since the whole loaf of life's happiness was denied her, she was a spendthrift to throw away the crumbs.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE COMING

The 8th of October dawned with a splendor of coloring which made the arch of the smoke-filled sky a roof of shifting opal. There was little wind, and though smoke still hung above the woods, it was not ribbed with glancing flame, as it had been the day before. A chatter of bird life came from the thickets. People remembered, as they had not in weeks, that it was the Sabbath, and a day of rest.

But the peace of the day was not for Birch Creek. Detiere's men came back each week to spend Sunday with their families, and this day a flag-decked wagon had come with them from Wilsonport. The crowd that filled the one low-browed saloon augured a quiet day for Xavier Lauzeone.

Olive and Katherine sat, their thoughts for occupation, waiting for nightfall. It was a tedious day, gauged even by the standards of a time when all the hours were long.

"Keep out of sight," Mr. Cole had advised, and had followed his own warning. He could not check the men; he must refuse to see them.

The noise from the saloon subsided at last, and

Katherine slipped out of the house for a breath of freer air. She made her way through the newly ploughed fire-break till she found a sheltering stump that hid her from the cottage. Olive and Mr. Cole would think her in her room; she would return before they missed her.

She sat, her chin upon her palm, and strove for gladness. Joy and she had traveled thus far determinedly hand in hand through somewhat showery weather. Why should her grasp relax now that the sunrise was upon her?

For it was the sunrise. It could not be else, this moment that was now hers. Her father was coming in a week; then they would take up their life together. "We will go away for a time," said his last letter. "You must see something of the world." She had hungered for the world; and now she was to see it. But to see it she must go away. She bit her palm fiercely to subdue the pain that choked her as she faced the thought. The physical smart gave her power to curb her dreams, to fix her thought upon the passing moment.

The moment now gave her the consciousness that it was growing warmer. The sun was setting in a mist of swimming vapor, and as she looked down at the settlement it wavered in crimson light. Answering color glowed in the growing darkness of the forest; in the hush which held the air the world seemed waiting. Yet the wind had died away.

The girl's breath tightened. The rock of sanity of which she had boasted crumbled beneath her.

She had seen panic in others these last weeks, and had marveled; now its terrors clutched at her. Every familiar outline was strange with menace. She covered her eyes from the picture.

But with closed eyes came fresh terrors. The breathless air held whisperings. To her diseased fancy the forest rustled to hushed footsteps. Then, of a sudden, fear grew concrete. All this might not be fancy. There might be men in hiding. Adrien, perhaps — and if Adrien, why not others? Were they waiting for Mr. Proctor?

The insanity of the moment claimed the thought as certainty. Dread, which she had checked for weeks, surged over her. Mr. Proctor was in danger — somewhere. She must go to him.

The madness of the impulse passed in time, and she rose to go to the cottage. But the road to Wilsonport beckoned. Mr. Proctor might be on it even now, coming to her. She wanted him; she needed him; he must know it. Unreasoning as the thought was, it bent her steps. If she could go to the bend of the road, she could see for a long distance. It was dusky now, and she would not be observed. One look would cure her of this folly; then she would go home.

She kept in the shelter of the timber till she reached the road, then walked swiftly and silently. The settlement was still hushed; the lifelessness of the air numbed her like a drug.

She had reached the bend when a rush of sound deafened her. She looked back. For a long instant sound and sight intermingled. Forest and

settlement were blackness, wind, and flame. Then she fell, face downward, in the road.

The road, she knew indefinitely, after a time, was her protection. She heard the grinding of the tempest as it mowed the trees, but she lay untouched. She found herself thinking calmly as she lay. Fear had left her suddenly as it had come.

Seconds passed, and the maddening noise subsided. She raised her head. Her eyes met blackness, and the wind beat her back with twigs and stones; but the fury of the whirlwind was over, and she stumbled to her feet. The darkness was smothering; she put out her hands to push it away. The prayer for help which her heart framed was an audible cry, —

"Oh, for light!"

The heavens answered. With a fresh roar the wind leaped from the side, and the cross-currents opened the wall of black. There was a blinding glimpse of fallen trees on a flame-fringed background; then darkness.

As Katherine stood a moment in indecision, hands touched her own. They were a child's hands, and with a cry she drew them toward her. It was Leopold Evard; the family lived next to the Cole cottage.

"Listen, Leopold," — she wiped the tears from the child's smoke-grimed face; — "you are all right now. The danger is over. Never mind if you can't see. This is nothing but smoke. Keep walking, — don't turn around, — and you 'll be at

home before you know it. Then go to Mr. Cole. Find him some way. Tell him I am all right. That I" — she framed the first deliberate untruth of her life — "am in good hands. He must not look for me. Do you understand?"

Leopold nodded. He was a quiet, intelligent child. Katherine knew that her message was safe.

She kissed the lad, and led him a few paces, then dropped his hand and turned away. Her face was set toward Wilsonport.

Her black and solitary way led now through a land of evil dreams. Smoke blinded, breathless, she went on and on, the dust beneath telling her that her feet were on the highway. The woods by the roadside were burning, she thought. She could hear cries of animals, and the crash of branches, but the rolling smoke-cloud wrapped her steps in mystery. In time figures passed; a deer, screaming with terror, struck at her with uncertain hoofs; she tripped and fell over some small woodland creature; but nothing slackened her pace. If human beings were near, as she sometimes thought, she could not help them, nor they her, and she made no outcry. She had no strength to squander.

Into this unreality came her name. "Katherine Edmister! Katherine Edmister!" The call rang clear and unhurried.

Katherine choked back her answering cry. The voice was Louis Detiere's. In an instant he was by her side.

"So?" He swung her to his shoulder in one motion. "I knew I find you."

The girl's lips controlled her second cry. "What do you mean?" She wrenched herself free, and slipped to the ground. "Where are you going?"

The man threw back his head and laughed as if to his great lungs the smoke-filled air was balm.

"I knew you," he chuckled. "I heard little Evard tell Cole. I knew you lied." He slipped an arm about her waist, and turned her toward Birch Creek. "Come on."

Katherine stopped; the opposition of her slender strength moved Detiere to fresh laughter.

"Spitfire!" he said, his teeth gleaming.

They had drawn near the side of the road, and the fire, licking at the bushes at their feet, lighted their faces. It showed the girl's steady eyes.

"You are very strong, Louis Detiere," she said quietly. "You can take me with you, and I can't help myself. But don't make me go. I beg you. I must go to Wilsonport."

Detiere swaggered. "You're afraid of me."

"Oh, it has nothing to do with you!" Her composure broke suddenly. "Let me go. I'm wasting time. I must find Mr. Proctor. My father left me. Mr. Proctor thinks that I am in his care. The whirlwind must have reached Wilsonport. Mr. Proctor will know that the wind will spread the fire, and will try to come to me. He will be burned to death. It is my fault, for I was proud, and would not go with him. Now let me go."

The man whistled. "You have the spunk!" His arm still pressed her toward Birch Creek.

"Look at me!" Katherine commanded. Her eyes claimed his through the flame-ribbed shadows. Her tone was now as calm as if they stood together on her own home trail upon a summer's day. "You are a strong man; you are never afraid. I understand strength. My father taught me. I am not afraid of you, for I have watched you. You never drink when you are working, and you keep a trust. Think! If you were a girl, you would do what I am doing now. Don't keep me. Don't!"

He hesitated. The flame at the girl's feet had fastened on her skirt, and he stooped and beat it out with his hands. Her eyes did not follow his motion. She was still pleading. "Please let me go."

Detiere peered at her closely. "You want to burn up?" Then the kinship which the girl had claimed seized him and conquered. "All right. Come on. It will be hell, but come on."

It was the girl who stopped. "But you must n't go!"

Flame answered her. One of the thousand whirlwinds of the night was upon them; the air boiled with fire, and they covered their faces, and fought for breath. Then wind and flame moved on.

Detiere pushed his face near the girl's. "Will you go now?" A sudden insanity of daring crin-

kled his face with laughter. "If you'll go, I'll go."

Katherine nodded. Her smoke-rasped lungs were incapable of speech, but her look did not flinch. He laughed again. "Come on."

Walking grew easier for a time. The wind, fickle that night as the flame upon its wings, veered to the south, and through the lifting smoke-cloud they could see again the glow of the lurid sky.

The man whose pace Katherine forced herself to meet timed his step as to a kermess holiday. The splendid freedom of the uncaged elements was in his blood. What was fear to others was his intoxication, a delirium of riotous adventure. He boasted fluently, and with constant laughter. His huge figure, colossal in the magnifying smoke, seemed at times to Katherine but a fantasy of the wild wind and flame.

He stopped at last and looked at her, his reckless glance glorying in her courage. "There's a cut-off," he said more sanely. "It saves two miles."

"Let us take it."

Detiere sobered. "All the world is cowards but you and me. If we die — all right." He turned to the flame-bound wall. "Take fast to my coat. The trees will be fallen on the trail. We have to climb."

Again Katherine halted. "Please go back. Why two lives?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. He laughed again, but this time grimly, as he pulled her on.

"Proctor is n't afraid of the devil either," he said, as he crashed into the forest. "He 'll be on the cut-off."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE RECOMPENSE

At six o'clock of Sunday the 8th of October Mr. Proctor was leaving his house in Wilsonport.

He had reached his gate when he looked up. To the south, the heavens, green-black, flame-belted, dropped upon the forest.

He looked but once, then stopped to snatch a blanket from the house. He knew, as he forged through the village, that people were screaming and pointing to the sky. The whirlwind had passed to the east, but the flame serpents in its train were crawling to the zenith.

He was beyond the schoolhouse on the Birch Creek road, when he heard Ferdinante Lauzeone call him. "Mr. Proctor!" The thud of her running feet came close behind him.

He would not stop, but she pushed her strength and reached him.

"You go to Birch Creek?"

"Yes. What is it? Every minute counts. Quick!"

"On foot?"

"Yes. I could n't get a horse through."

"You know the cut-off?"

"No."

"Adrien must show you. It's two miles shorter."

"Can you find Adrien?"

"Yes."

They were walking steadily. The man turned his head now, and looked at Ferdinante for the first time. She swung beside him, massive, leonine, her long stride taxing his strength.

"How did you know that I was going? Did you see me?"

"I did n't see. But there was only one road. I knew you would go when the wind came. I knew you would get to Katherine Edmister."

He accepted her knowledge in silence, and walked on. Nothing seemed strange nor worthy of comment.

"Wait here for me," Ferdinante said after a time. She disappeared with her words. Mr. Proctor could hear her give a low bird call as she followed some unseen path.

Even to his hot impatience she was back soon, Adrien with her. The lad's sullen look showed no recognition of Mr. Proctor, but he pushed by the man and led the way. No explanation stirred Ferdinante's face. She followed, watchful, impassive.

The beginning of the cut-off lay in the path of the whirlwind. As they left the road the smoke grew thick and sulphurous. The trees which barred their way were even then quivering from their fall.

Adrien stopped and spoke for the first time. "We 'll be choked. I won't go."

Ferdinante pushed him forward. "Go on."

"Stop!" said Mr. Proctor. "Unless the trail branches I can follow it alone. Is it a straight path, Adrien?"

The boy looked up through lowered brows. "Yes."

Ferdinante laid a hand upon her brother's shoulder. She towered a head above him, and her voice was dominant.

"Tell the truth. You know what I do if you lie. Is the trail straight?"

The boy folded his arms. "No. It forks several times in the first mile. After Brandt's clearing it 's a single trail."

Ferdinante herself led the way. "We go to Brandt's."

They fought their way in silence for a time. The fire, which seemed the spirit of the wind, was with them now, only to vanish. It leaped to the ground in front of them, its shivering flame catching at the twigs and grass; then, torn and harried by the wind, it swept from sight over the treetops. Still the three went on. Adrien's one rebellion was his last. Some force outside of Mr. Proctor's ken lay in Ferdinante's hold upon her brother's arm.

Through all his terrible anxiety the man felt compunction. He begged the girl to take her brother and go back. She listened unmoved. "After we get to Brandt's," was all that she would say.

The trail grew more difficult as it led deeper

into the forest. The animals that had used it as a runway during the happy summer disputed for its possession now; coals and charred twigs fell about them.

Mr. Proctor took the blanket from his arm, and threw it over Ferdinante.

She looked at it. "You brought it for Katherine Edmister?"

"I — Yes."

"Keep it." She crowded it back into his hands with unhurried disdain. "I don't want it. Everybody does things for her."

"Why are you doing this for her, Ferdinante?" Words were precious, but the man was reckless of them. "Why go through this misery for a girl you speak of in that tone?"

Ferdinante looked at him. Her mane of hair was loose upon her shoulders, and she looked out from it, regnant, wonderful. Framed by the flame-lighted forest she towered above her cowering brother like impassive Fate.

"Because Adrien must." She stopped and spoke with deliberation, as if the time for explanation were come. "Katherine Edmister does n't need me to like her. I was nobody. I never had a chance. But she saved Adrien. He went by her and stayed away from his church. He would have burned in hell. But she sent him away. He must do this. It is right. He must go to Brandt's."

CHAPTER XXX

THE MEASURE

BRANDT'S clearing passed, Mr. Proctor went on alone. The trail was well defined. He could push his endurance to its limit.

At first the sight of two dim figures stumbling toward him meant nothing ; then the woman raised her head.

"Katherine ! Katherine ! " He threw Detiere aside and had her in his arms. "Katherine ! "

He did not stop to question the miracle, or answer the girl's soft cry. He wrapped her in the blanket and turned to Detiere.

"We 're near Brandt's clearing. Follow me."

A man, running blindly from a side path, stumbled against them. He was whimpering and sobbing.

"Brandt's ! " He caught Detiere by the sleeve. "Take me to Brandt's."

"So? My little friend, Pierre Gigot ! " Detiere turned the man around, and squandered breath in laughter. "Last week you say you lead Proctor by the nose. Now he lead you. See ? "

"Don't play with your strength, Detiere," Mr. Proctor took breath to say. "The clearing may not save us."

The clearing was before them in a moment.

The smoke-cloud, lighter in the freer air, showed moving figures, and the night was torn with human cries. Bright coals were falling in the open field.

The men's eyes sought each other.

"It won't do, Detiere." Mr. Proctor drew Katherine closer. "We must find higher ground."

The people huddled in the centre of the field were from many scattered farms. They gave no heed to the trio that approached them. Moaning and crying, no misery could move them but their own.

The Katherine that Detiere said could not know fear found herself trembling. She had drawn herself from Mr. Proctor's arm to save him from her weight, but her look crept to him for refuge. No terror of the blazing woods had beaten down her courage as did this nakedness of human fear.

Mr. Proctor was begging the people to listen. Speech was agony, but he did not spare it.

"It 's gas that 's burning, and it keeps to the low ground. You 'll be smothered here — or worse — before the night 's over. Better to die quickly in the woods. Pine Knob may save us. I know the way."

The people did not even lift their heads. A woman laughed foolishly, and played with her bright beads. "Pretty!" she gurgled.

"Pouf!" said Detiere. He had been pleading in Belgian with equal unsuccess. "Take her off, Proctor. I 'll drive these pigs." He took his suggestively well-polished sheath knife and flashed it before them. "But take the girl away."

Proctor bent to Katherine. "Can you do it?" He had not spoken to her before since his first cry, but his hand had not left hers.

"Yes," she looked up steadily, though her voice was faint, "and we must go. We hinder him. He can drive the people if he is alone."

The man suddenly caught her to him. He was unconscious of the motion. "It will be torture in the woods, Katherine." He shook with the anguish of the decision that he must make for her. "But it may save us. It 's death here."

She smiled up at him and brushed at a coal that had fallen upon his sleeve. "Where you think best."

"She 'll do it," Detiere interposed. "Nobody is like her."

Something in the tone stayed Proctor's eyes. A thought was born in all the storm and horror.

"There is another, Detiere — Ferdinante Lauzeone. She came with me to-night. Drove Adrien before her, and made him show me the trail."

The Belgian swore softly and fluently. "Where is she?"

"She went back with Adrien. They took the cut-off to Wilsonport."

Detiere was prodding at the men. "I 'll drive my pigs that way. Take your girl off." His voice was electric as he turned to Proctor. "I go on the cut-off."

The plunge into the furnace of the forest showed Mr. Proctor that the delay in the clearing had been costly. More than gas was burning now.

The ground was covered with blazing twigs. The man drew the corners of the blanket under his arm and half dragged, half carried, Katherine with him.

He knew that she was trying to save him what she could, but with every step her weight grew more inert. He stopped at last, and held the blanket as a screen above her.

"We 'll make it yet. I 've seen a surveyor's map. Pine Knob is near the clearing on this side. Look at me, Katherine!"

She met his cry with an effort for a smile, but she could not answer. With the first groan that the night had drawn from him, he wrapped her closely, took her in his arms, and staggered on.

The fire was everywhere about him now, trickish and elfin. It had a thousand sports and fantasies. It throttled him and beat him to the earth, then leaped away to hold a torch for his bleeding progress. Now it closed round him in a death-embracing wall; now left an open track that promised safety. There was no reassurance in its lightness. It was the frolic of the fiends of torment, and the horror of it drove men mad.

What came from that time on, he could not tell. He fought the demons of the night and conquered, but how, he did not know. His eyes seemed dancing balls of light, and his mind wandered with them, but his feet, sensitive to each incline, found their way upward. The trees at last ceased whipping him with fiery brands. He had reached the foot of the Pine Knob opening.

But this was not the end. Pine Knob was steep, and the way rough. Could he climb it? The stir in his arms, that told him Katherine was living, was his answer.

He fell at times, beaten by what seemed death, but each fall stiffened the tried metal of his will, and the end came. His feet stopped climbing, and his failing sight showed him an open field. What reason had called madness had been done. This was Pine Knob.

How long he lay dazed he did not know. The higher air, comparatively smoke free, roused him at last, and he stumbled to his feet. Katherine was unconscious, but her wavering breath calmed his sick fear.

He turned from her to look below them. The knob overlooked the forest, and the man who had thought that his mind no longer knew surprise, dropped to his knees.

Awe, pity, racking sorrow, anxiety for one whom he held dear, dread, hopelessness, and torture, — all had been his since the last setting of the sun. But never terror; that reached him only as he looked on the ruin of what had been his world.

East, west, north, south — far as the eye could register — destruction met him. The fire was now no teasing demon, torturing, then sparing, that it might torture more. It moved in bands like a deploying army. Beautiful, remorseless, calm with the loneliness of death, it advanced with battlemented front, and the forest crumpled to a writhing pot of flame.

Here the fire wall moved slowly, with implacable majesty of progress ; here it ran more swiftly than the thought that followed it, riding the wind in serpenting banners that twisted toward the stars. But everywhere it moved. On — on — Where would it end? Hundreds of miles of dry and close-packed timber lay waiting for its touch. And the homes and villages between?

Terror passed slowly with the man, to merge into dread wonder. Katherine safe — from this — and he beside her! He turned to watch her face for reassurance, and trembled now as he had failed to do when death had grappled with him for her hand. A few minutes more, and he could not have saved her. They had been just in time.

But were they, after all, in time? The doubt grew — grew with the moments — till, full-fledged and conquering, it strangled hope. God coveted the living world that night — man — bird — and beast. There was no ark of refuge in this sea of flame. The island where they lay was so far safe, but around them rolled a fast encroaching tide ; its plume-crested billows were near them even now.

The man, who watched approach him the death that he had fought for hours, lay wrapped in peace. Death had no weapons. Majestic, desolate, it beckoned; it looked a respite. Even love was dwarfed. He had done what he could, and he had failed — failed in this, as he had failed in life. Death would bring the rest for which his torn and aching spirit cried.

The clarity of mind that comes after long ill-

ness to the dying comforted him now. He thought of what this sea below him covered. What love, what crime, what happiness, what sin — all wiped away. The frenzied beings whom he had seen that night — all silent. They, with what uncounted throngs of souls, were at this moment meeting the mystery of the after life. What would they find? And he?

How trivial it all looked now, — the strife that he had thought a tragedy the day before — the intrigues — his vain regrets — the petty strivings! Yet he would not belittle it; it had been life. And it was over. Master and servant, they were going now — the same old road. Would the myriad feet that had gone before them have beaten down the thorns?

Beautiful, invincible, the fire wall moved on.

Yet with it all, with all the fact that he had failed, and that his penance came too late, was he not, even now, most blessed? For Katherine had come to him — the Katherine he loved. How, or why, he now could never know. But the fact was his. In stress that broke men's reason, she had come to him.

Flying battalions of the flame passed over him; each step was nearer.

Why not tell her his story. It had lain long near his heart to say! He took her in his arms, and let the words that he had smothered for a year crowd on his lips. His strength was failing, but he husbanded the wreck of it with care. He would complete his tale.

He knew at last that he should fail to hear her, even should she speak. The pit below him showed the outlines of his childhood's home. He knew that was the end.

He gathered his endurance for the one duty that remained him — to wrap her yet more closely. Flames were about him now, and he begged of them to spare her face. Then, hiding his own face close to hers, he closed his eyes. He was ready for the morning that should come.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE PROMISE OF THE COVENANT

After oblivion, instinct came to show him that his arms were empty. He groped to find his burden; he found himself, instead, drawn back by hands that met his own.

"Hush!" Katherine crooned. "Lie still a little longer."

Katherine's voice! His arms went out, as they had done many times the night before, and claimed her. "It 's you, Katherine? Are you much hurt? I can't see. Tell me, are you much — did the fire" —

"I 'm — almost unhurt. It 's you." A sob which she could not suppress shook them both as he held her closely.

"I don't quite understand. But your voice — Somehow I can't see. It is n't daylight. Or — am I blind?"

"No, no, you can't be blind!" The hands that touched his face were tear wet. "Your face is swollen. It 's that — and the smoke. It 's past sunrise, I think, though it 's not very light. It 's cloudy."

"But the fire?"

"It 's over. The ground is smouldering, but

there 's no flame below us. I think that very little of the fire reached us here."

He released her slowly, and sat in silence. His mind could hold but the thought that Katherine was alive; he must prick his brain to more.

"Katherine, I must" —

"Is n't it 'we must'?" A hand slipped into his.

"I — Katherine!"

"Oh," — the girl, who had crept back to his arms, trembled with sudden sobs, — "did you mean it all?" she asked brokenly. "All that you told me last night — your loneliness — your longing for me? And you seemed so — indifferent. If I could have known!"

His grip upon her arm brought tears. "You heard me?"

"I could n't answer. I was — Don't, don't! I 'm all right now. Oh, if I 'd had more strength I could have saved your eyes!"

"But you heard me. I 'm waiting. Be — merciful, and answer. I can't see your face."

The face that he could not see turned to his shoulder; the look that he was giving her she could not meet, even though his eyes were sightless. He did not need an answer.

Yet he demanded more. He was a man — and helpless.

"But are you sure? Katherine, this is n't to help me through?"

She slipped from him in a flare of indignation. "Could I have come to you as I did now — even to have saved both our lives? How can you!

And you must n't think" — Then his face conquered. "Oh, do you care like that! I — I'm afraid that I care even more."

Yet it was not a time for caresses, and they did not need them. They had stood with Death, and even now they dropped his hand-clasp with misgiving. His touch did not mean separation; they would go on together.

Yet with the gravity that wrapped them both, came flashes of sudden joy that they could not withstand. Philip's ghost stood with them once again, but now his look was gracious.

"Yet I promised," said the man. He never spoke of that again, but the thought died hard. That was the price that he paid — the aloe that love mixes always with her sweet.

They made no plans. If they could reach the road, they might find rescue, — should any be living in this world of doom; but what had been the forest lay hideous in smoke, and they were parched and crippled.

They had lain silent for a time, content to let the fact that they were side by side speak for them, when Katherine started with a cry.

"A drop of rain!" The words sounded like the wandering of madness.

But it was true. The miracle denied for weary months came now as softly as if it fell on fields of waving grain. From out a sky of even gray it dropped in slant lines on the hissing earth. This was no summer shower. The redemption of the promise of the covenant had come.

They caught the blessed drops and drank new life. Katherine tore her clothing into bandages, and bound them, water-soaked, upon the man's hot eyes. Then, hand in hand, they began their journey. Their fight for life showed promise now, but it was far from won.

No horror of the night had prepared them fully for what they were to meet. There was little timber standing, and the ground was piled high with logs — logs that crumbled under their feet, to show the red of furnace fires. All life but theirs seemed stilled. Men and animals had sought the low land by the streams, where the foul gas meant death; and when after a time the wanderers reached the road, the apathy of their own approaching end had fallen on them. The steady rain, so grateful at the first, was numbing, and their chilled frames lost the strength to nourish hope. Yet they were together. If they were found in life or death, their faces would show joy.

The shouts that came to them at last seemed from another world, but life sent up an answering pulse, and they gathered forces for a cry. Paul Livingstone answered. He came down the rain-sodden, steaming road, leading a mule among the fallen timber; the cart that rattled after carried food and blankets.

He stared as if at spectres, then fell upon his knees.

"Two alive!" he cried. "Thank thee for them, O Father, and help me to find more!"

The others found their knees for that last cry.

These three together on their knees at last, the horror of the woods about them! The silence lasted but a moment.

"What news, Livingstone? I know your voice. Quick, man! Remember, I can't see!"

"Some reached town. You 're all I 've found out here. Look out — she 's falling!"

Mr. Proctor tore the wrappings from his eyes, and strained for sight. He could see a little. He gave himself a moment to hold Katherine close and make her presence sure. "Tell me more!" He laid the girl in the cart among the blankets as he spoke. "Quick, Livingstone!"

"It 's what you see — north, south. The land 's wiped out."

"But Wilsonport?"

"Your mill 's burned."

"Yes, yes. But the people."

"Safe. We went into the lake."

"What 's being done? There may be others alive in the woods."

"There are two teams behind me. The bodies" —

"Hush! She may hear. Take her back, Livingstone. She 's light, and you can carry her. I 'll take the mule to Birch Creek. But I can't see!"

The schoolmaster scowled. "Go back yourself. You can't take my chance away from me. I must go on. I am the wickedest of men. I tell you that the land has been wiped out. I told the people that it was the Day of Judgment. If it had

not been for me, they might have fought the fire. If I can save some lives, I can die better."

"No army of men could have fought this fire." Mr. Proctor held himself upright by the wheels of the cart. "You can't die — nor will I. There's work for us. We've both made mistakes. But this is a reprieve. Our work has just begun."

"But this is ruin!"

"It is God's ruin," said the other man. "He needs" — His words were failing.

Livingstone helped him into the cart, and turned the mule toward Wilsonport.

"And you believe that we have another chance?" Livingstone asked. He looked at Mr. Proctor's face unbitter and serene; his own took new resolve. "God help us both. I'll try."

CHAPTER XXXII

STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES

THE cart that jolted into Wilsonport brought two silent bodies. But youth is strong; Mr. Proctor and Katherine dragged themselves to life, and called for work to do.

It was the doctor's face that answered them — Katherine's father. The tug that brought him in the night seemed only then a miracle. Later they knew that all the steam craft of the upper lake had plied the work of rescue.

There was no time for tears or explanations in that meeting. Each breath might mean the saving of a life. The doctor's heart, with all its anguish of pity, held thanksgiving. He had come in time. His defection had not cost lives — the lives of his people. His hands' swift skill meant life to those he loved. He thanked God humbly.

The news came fast — not all of horror. Some heights of human sacrifice were reached that night that held the hush of Heaven. But the roll call of the dead grew till it dulled all hearing.

Birch Creek — the name is never mentioned now; for there are still lips left to whiten at the sound. The rescuing party made their way there first, but they found no survivors; and when they

looked among the dead, they knew that this was mercy. George Cole's face, hidden in the sawdust, was untouched, and it held comfort. His Maker had not failed him at the end.

But life could be lived again, and as knowledge of the majesty of the destruction grew — as the far-spread counties of the Northland sent their tale — came unexpected healing. The world that seemed so far away — that outside world, remote and unregarded — stopped to hold out arms of help and pity. Brotherhood grew a near and holy name when every day brought succor.

Even smiles grew possible — and precious. Courage, with sweetness and laughter and a refusal to look backward, — these were the weapons for the day. To all who had looked as these people had done into the mysteries that hedge the confines of God's world, life could not be the same. It must be richer even if more chastened. Character might not be created, but it was stripped to its elements.

"How we like to see our estimates justified, Proctor," Dr. Edmister mused, with his old tolerant smile. "Livingstone is a distinct gratification to my vanity these days."

Mr. Proctor stopped. He was unpacking the boxes that the world had sent, while Dr. Edmister itemized their contents. "Livingstone tells me that Heinrich understands brick-laying," he said, with frowning absorption. "If the material for the smokestack comes to-morrow, we can begin sawing by Friday."

The friends did not smile at the transition of thought. It was of such varying threads that life now was made.

There was work for all. Some of the timber could be used if sawed at once, and logging was pushed in every hour of daylight. The warped machinery of the mill was to be replaced, new homes built. The hours were too short. Whatever the sorrow, there grew in all minds the underlying content of fruitful labor.

And it was united labor.

"I heard Yngve lecturing Mr. Livingstone and Karen last night," Katherine said one day. "I could have thought that it was you, Mr. Robert Proctor, — tone and precept. 'Fellowship!' 'Community of interest!' You 've been proselyting."

"Yngve 's still a mirror." The man's eyes went to the girl's in happy understanding. "The sky has changed and he reflects it. That 's all."

Yes, the sky had changed. The fellowship that Mr. Proctor had striven for somewhat consciously had come without his knowledge. He had not time now to recognize or classify his new relation to his world; he felt, however, that he was working with his friends.

But the doctor, looking on, smiled tenderly. He knew it was not the tragedy which they had all been through that had wrought this new democracy. The fire had wiped the slate clean for new deeds, but with all its meaning and majesty it was, after all, only an accident; the transforming forces for this regeneration had been born before. Na-

ture, the doctor meditated, does not create new life even by cataclysm; she unfolds what was there. The trust and respect now given Mr. Proctor were not a miraculous flowering. The seeds had been sown during the cruel summer when there had been none in the village to call him friend.

Detiere shrugged his huge shoulders at the change. "I knew what the men were going to do if the fire had n't come. The day of the fire I had them at Birch Creek. They was drunk — very drunk. They told" — But his story, begun in joyous complacence, ended there. After all, the men had been his comrades. The past was canceled. Even to his mind, only the future was of moment now.

Detiere was a hero — and accepted the distinction blandly. It would be long before the tale of his entry into Wilsonport that night could be told calmly. Burned and bleeding, he had driven his cowering band before him out of the flame-clouds, urging them with knife and jest till they reached safety.

Dr. Edmister heard the story, with lips hard set not to show their trembling.

"Spectacular to the last, confound him!" he grumbled. "The worst of it is, that I 've been wrong about him, and have got to tell him so."

Detiere met the doctor's proffered hand with perfect comprehension.

"Too bad you was away," he said. "You would have done it too. We are alike, you and I."

The doctor looked the Belgian over with con-

sideration — a look which he forced the man's bold eyes to meet.

"No, Detiere," he said slowly. "You are a brave man. Here is my hand. But we are not alike. I do not get drunk, and I have all my life been true to one woman."

Detiere's complacence ebbed. "But that is the way I used to be," he protested almost nervously. "I am not like that now — since the fire. I 'm to have charge of Proctor's mill. Then, when Ferdinante" —

"I see. You 're not half worth her, Detiere, but I 've hope that you 'll make her happy. She 's had little enough. And she needs your strength."

"But she is braver than a man." The lines in Detiere's face had learned a certain softness. "I found her that night on the cut-off. Adrien had left her, and she wanted to die. But when I came, there was people to save, so she came with me. And now she makes me wait because Adrien is dead."

"Have patience," the doctor sighed. "She is a thousand times worth it. Leave her to Katherine for a while."

Many things were left to Katherine these days — so many, her lover complained, that she was at all Wilsonport's service save his own.

She eyed him, after such remarks, over the barricade of a chair back, and her mouth had new curves. Had he once said that there were three Katherines? There were a hundred now, and each one demanded that he win her separately and in turn.

Yet he had moments all his own. One of them came one afternoon as they sat together on the beach. Indian summer breathed sorcery in the air, and the October light turned the lake to a quiver of rose and pearl. The scarred forest lay behind them, out of sight and thought; before, were only the mystery of the silent water and the spreading vistas of the sky.

"It 's going to your world, Katherine," Mr. Proctor said, as they watched a ship sink into the silver haze. "The world that is n't to be yours, after all. That hurts sometimes. I had hoped to give you more. It 's a poor marriage."

Katherine covered her eyes. "Is it a poor marriage," she breathed, "when one wakes every morning to say, 'To-day I can stand near him, watch him at his work, help him — a very little'" —

He had her hand in his, and the clasp that he gave it answered her. Yet he would not be stilled.

"Think what it means. You wanted life. That was your pot of gold. And this means self-denial, work, and care."

The lengthening shadows shielded Katherine as she crept nearer.

"Add love — why, that *is* life," she said.

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